

Re: support of H8155

RI Committee on Judiciary

May 7, 2024

Chair Craven and members of Judiciary:

I am writing in support of H8155, a bill that more easily facilitates the legal name changes for transgender people and those escaping domestic violence. I want to thank the lead sponsor, Chair Craven, for his leadership on this bill, and co-sponsors Caldwell and McEntee for their support. This bill not only embodies principles of equality and justice but also recognizes the inherent dignity and autonomy of every individual. I write as the parent of a transgender adult child and as a social worker who spent a decade working with survivors of domestic abuse.

First, for many transgender individuals, the ability to change their name is not merely a matter of preference; it is a fundamental aspect of self-determination and personal identity. By streamlining the legal process for name changes, we can empower transgender individuals to live more authentically. My 24-year old is in the process of changing their name legally. They have wanted to do this for many years and have not done so because of their anxiety about the current process. They are particularly upset about the need for public recognition or notice of their given name; they haven't used this name for almost 10 years and are extremely anxious about it being publicly acknowledged.

In addition to streamlining the process for trans people, we cannot ignore the plight of people trapped in abusive relationships. As you may know, the most dangerous time for survivors is when they leave the person abusing them. They can be stalked, threatened, seriously injured, and killed. Sometimes, the only way to start over is with a new name, new location, and complete privacy. However, the current legal process for name changes makes that impossible. By making name changes more affordable, accessible and private, we can provide survivors the means to break free and rebuild their lives with less fear of retaliation.

This bill is not just about changing names; it is about affirming the basic human rights of transgender individuals and survivors of domestic violence. It is about recognizing their agency and respecting their journey towards self-actualization and healing. By passing this bill, we send a powerful message that we stand on the side of justice, equality, and compassion.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Wendy Becker, PhD, LICSW

