

Ezra MacLeod Towne

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Favorable Testimony for HB0039 Action for Change of Name - Waiver of Publication Requirement

January 15, 2021

Chair Delegate Luke Clippenger, Vice-Chair Delegate Vanessa E. Atterbeary, and other esteemed members of the House Judiciary Committee:

My name is Ezra Towne, and I use the pronouns they/them/theirs. **I submit this testimony in support of HB0039** - Action for Change of Name - Waiver of Publication Requirement. I do so as a non-binary transmasculine person, an activist for trans communities in and around Montgomery County, a resident of Silver Spring for nearly 16 years, and a parent of two kids that attend Montgomery County Public Schools.

My spouse and I welcomed our first child in 2008. I soon found myself writing the name my parents gave me on more documents, more frequently than ever before. Even though I had already used “Ezra” in all social, professional, and familial contexts for several years – the exhaustion of having to mark every enrollment and permission form for pre-schools, school, and activities with both my chosen and birth name hadn’t fully set in. When we welcomed a new child to our family in 2012, the number of forms doubled and I couldn’t handle it much longer.

In 2015, I legally changed my name to Ezra MacLeod Towne. This name more accurately reflects the gender I know myself to be. My change of name also removed much of the stress in child care and schooling logistics, writing checks, getting bills, retaining medical records, opening new accounts and other day to day parts of my life. When I went to the circuit court with all of the forms and documents required to pursue a name change, I paid the required fees and scheduled publication.

I am incredibly lucky that my financial and residential status is stable – but this is not the case for many trans people, nor for survivors of domestic abuse, sexual assault, stalking, and harassment. Requiring publication causes unnecessary risks to the privacy, safety, and security of all Marylanders seeking a name change. It presumes that individuals can wait additional weeks or months before completion of the order, and that they can afford the fee for publication. Costs for publication of name change vary widely across the state from \$50 to \$250.

HB0039 allows for a safer, more just name change process for Marylanders. The bill would: require all motions to waive publication be granted, reduce the potential for hostile or discriminatory responses directed at those pursuing a name change, and protect the privacy of all Marylanders as they go through this process. Seventeen other states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico have already eliminated publication requirements for name changes.

Passing this bill WILL NOT harm state and local agencies which require notification of name change. (e.g. financial creditors; victims of domestic violence or sexual assault; judicial actions, pre and post release notifications for incarcerated or formerly incarcerated people with criminal records; non-custodial parent notification of a minor's pursuit of a name change, and/or a change in legal test when parents, guardians, or custodians disagree.) Claims that HB0039 will make notification exceptionally difficult are baseless – all of the above notification requirements are already addressed in Maryland law.

I urge you to support HB0039. Ensuring privacy during the name change process can and will save lives.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ezra Towne', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ezra Towne

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