

February 3, 2025

Subject: Testimony in Support of the Birth Certificate Modernization Act SB0314

To the Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for the Birth Certificate Modernization Act. As a licensed clinical social worker in private practice in Ellicott City, specializing in work with adolescents and adults within the LGBTQIA+ community, I have witnessed firsthand the challenges posed by the current birth certificate process. My experience, both professionally and personally as a cisgender queer parent, has made it clear that this legislation is crucial for the well-being of many Marylanders.

For the past three years, I have been an advocate with CARY (Community Allies for Rainbow Youth) and it is through their legislative advocacy branch that I became aware of this bill. In my private practice, I have assisted numerous clients with the birth certificate name and gender marker change process. I have seen the significant hurdles that transgender and non-binary individuals face in navigating this system.

The current inconsistencies in gender marker policies across Maryland agencies create unnecessary complications for transgender parents. Fourteen states already recognize the self-identification of gender on birth certificates, a model that Maryland should emulate. The Birth Certificate Modernization Act would significantly simplify life transitions—including marriage, parenthood, and name changes—for countless Marylanders.

For individuals experiencing stress, anxiety, trauma, or depression, even seemingly simple administrative tasks can become overwhelming. The added stress of the name and gender marker process can create additional barriers to well-being. When individuals are struggling with mental health challenges, tasks that are not immediately survival-focused often get postponed, leading to further complications and feelings of invalidation every time they are required to complete a form that requires their legal name or gender marker.

Passing the Birth Certificate Modernization Act is not simply a matter of administrative efficiency; it is a matter of dignity, respect, and mental health. It will ease the burden on transgender and non-binary individuals and families, allowing them to focus on their lives and well-being. I urge you to vote in favor of this vital legislation.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Zwarich, LCSW-C

CARY Member