



To the honorable members of the Somerville City Council:

We are the Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition, the oldest transgender advocacy organization in the United States. Over the past 24 years, we have represented and advocated for the inclusion and affirmation of trans, nonbinary, and gender-expansive people in Massachusetts. Through our work, we have successfully fought for civil rights and public accommodations for all trans people in Massachusetts.

We are writing in support of Item 26-8616 to establish an LGBTQ Legal Services Stabilization Fund in the City of Somerville, which will help transgender, genderqueer, and nonbinary residents of Somerville pay the costs for a legal name change. Although everyone has the right to change their name in Massachusetts, the court fees can be prohibitive. This is especially salient for the trans community, since we are more likely to be unemployed, underemployed, or low-income compared with our cisgender counterparts. According to the 2022 US Transgender Survey, over a third of trans people live in poverty, and 18% are unemployed. When so many of us are in dire economic straits, it may be impossible to afford a legal name change alongside housing, utilities, food, and transportation. The fight for trans justice must therefore incorporate economic justice.

Living without a legal name change carries significant risks. Though the state technically allows common-law name changes without a court decree, the federal government, banks, and other entities will not change a name without a legal paper trail. Trans people run the risk of being forcibly outed, misgendered, harassed, or otherwise mistreated with documentation that does not match their identity. Mismatched identification can even result in violence, especially during confrontations with law enforcement. The 2022 US Trans Survey also found that nearly half of trans people in the US did not have ID documents with their chosen name and nearly a quarter were verbally harassed, assaulted, asked to leave a location, or denied services when they have shown someone an ID with a name or gender that did not match their presentation.

Moreover, former names may be bound up with psychological trauma from living an inauthentic life, evoking emotional reactions when performing everyday tasks like filling out paperwork. All these are reasons to remove the financial barrier for trans people to legally change their names.

Because legal name changes are vital to trans people's well-being, we strongly urge Somerville's municipal government to establish the LGBTQ Legal Services Stabilization Fund to promote the well-being and social integration of trans, nonbinary, and genderqueer people across the city in line with the city's previously shown commitment to being a welcoming and safer community.