

EDITED BY PFLAG TO REMOVE IDENTIFICATION  
How I Changed My Name  
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This is how I accomplished my name change in Maryland. Each state has its own specific procedure for this, but you may find the details of my particular experience useful.

First a little background about me. Except for my workplace, I had been living as female since April 2001. I have since initiated my transition at work. For the account of my first day going to work as female please read my story "It's a Very Good Feeling" in November 19th's issue of Transgender Forum. In July I began the effort to change my name.

In preparation for this my therapist loaned me her copy of Dallas Denny's book "Identity Management in Transexualism" which I highly recommend for anyone considering doing this.

How does one choose a name? This, as it turns out, was no easy task. My name would represent my identity and will be with me for a very long time. My name should have that all-important feeling of "ownership" too. It needs to fit. I had asked my Mother what name she and Dad (now deceased) had chosen for me if I were born a girl, but she just couldn't remember. I located an Internet site listing 3000 female names! I read every one. Many of the names were very, very beautiful, but not one seemed to have the right "fit" for me.

Since April, I had been satisfied being addressed as Jo (short for John, my boy name) by my family and friends. My spouse addresses me by a pet name, and soon "Jo" became "Jo-sie" which I like a lot. But for me "Josie" isn't really a proper name even though it's a great nickname. (If you are wondering – I DO have a couple of pussycats!) But I wanted something a little more formal. I finally decided on a name that I had been using for several years.

Although one may not need a lawyer for this, I felt that especially considering the reason I am doing this it would wise to request his assistance. I went to see him in mid-July. I was a bit apprehensive since this would be the first time he would see me as female.

It turned out not to be a problem although he did admit that he never did a name change for my particular reason. He explained that a petition was required to be filed with the county circuit court. The court would also publish a public notice of my name change in one edition of a local periodical of my choice (but with the court's approval). If no one objected to my name change within the period of time set by the court, a judge will sign the order making it official. At no time would I need to appear. An up-front fee of \$100 for the court would be required to file the petition and to pay for publishing the notice.

I did ask why anyone might object to name change. He explained that I shouldn't expect any problem since I am only changing my first name but in the case of a surname, some persons feel an ownership of their family name and will object to another taking it arbitrarily. I think we all can understand that.

He also explained that under Old English law, each of us has the right to be called anything we want as long as our change of name is not for a fraudulent purpose such as concealing one's identity, evading creditors, avoiding criminal prosecution, etc. I also had to write a short reason in my own words stating why I wanted to change my name. I would need to be honest, but I did not want to be too direct and possibly cause complications. This was the time to be creative. I decided to put a little "spin" on it. Here is how it appeared on my petition:

"...to avoid confusion as to the identity and image he presents to the public, ..."

Perfectly honest! I made no mention of my GID or any reference to a transgendered condition. I then filled out a preliminary copy of the petition with all the required information. My attorney

proceeded to prepare the official petition for our next meeting. Near the end of July, I went to his office and with my spouse as a witness. I read, signed and dated all the applicable sections of the petition, attached a copy of my original birth certificate as "EXHIBIT A" and a copy of my current social security card as "EXHIBIT B". My attorney then notarized it and it was ready for presentation to the court. Several days later he called to inform me that it had been filed.

The court assigned the "object by" date in September. The public notice was published in a local newspaper in August. There was nothing to do now except wait. The day in September came and went and I did not hear anything. I returned from my vacation in early October only to find a letter from my attorney containing three documents marked "True Copy Test", stamped and embossed with the court's seal! My legal name was changed. Needless to say, I was elated!

It had been just as I've read - pretty much a bureaucratic exercise. I would urge anyone considering changing his or her name to give it considerable thought before beginning the process. My attorney says that here in Maryland, one can change their name as many times as he or she desires. His fee was about \$650 for this so I wouldn't want to do it any more than necessary.

This was the easy part. The real effort came in updating the umpteen places that have my name on file. Sometimes a simple phone call or Fax'd court order is sufficient to get it done. With others, a personal visit is required. It's been a couple of months now and I've made a lot of progress with this, but there's much more to do. I just keep reminding myself - every one finished is one less that needs to be done. Maybe another six months or so...