

Non-Binary Driver Licenses: Combatting Discrimination and Dysphoria

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THESIS

To provide documentation that correctly identifies the gender of people who identify outside the gender binary and prevent discrimination against them, the Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles should issue non-binary driver licenses.

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

People whose gender identities do not correspond with the sex that they were assigned at birth face perpetual and systematic oppression. They are often misunderstood and discriminated against, and they even face violence because of their identities. In surveys sent to transgender and non-binary people, 52 percent reported bullying in school, 60 percent reported a healthcare provider refusing to treat them, and 58 percent reported harassment by law enforcement officials.¹

These iniquities are compounded when transgender and non-binary people have government documentation, such as state ID cards or driver licenses, that lists names and genders that do not match their gender identity and expression. Having identification that properly reflects their gender could decrease suicidal ideation in 90 out of 1,000 transgender or non-binary people.²

The process of changing one's driver's license to non-binary is available in Maine, Oregon, California, and Washington, DC.³ Each state has its own procedures, such as applying stickers on licenses, providing online applications, or offering the opportunity to appeal the courts. The common theme they all share is making their current state system easy to navigate and straightforward.

In Connecticut, the current process for people who are transgender to alter their driver license is neither. People must first see a medical professional, who diagnoses them with gender dysphoria. Next, they have to legally change their name, which requires going to court and waiting for a court date. People can wait months before their name is legally changed. Then, they must fill out a form and go to their local Department of Motor Vehicles site to officially change the driver license to reflect the new information. The medical visit, name change, and the license change all require wait times and fees, which could require people to take time off from work and pay extra money to simply be identified as who they are. The process is discriminatory and inordinately challenging for people at a lower socioeconomic status.

KEY FACTS

- Suicide attempt rates for out non-binary and transgender people is 50 percent, compared to the national average of 4.6 percent.¹¹
- Having identification that properly reflects gender could decrease suicidal ideation in 90 out of 1,000 transgender or non-binary people.¹²

TALKING POINTS

- Allowing for a non-binary option on driver licenses can help transgender and non-binary people avoid discrimination in schools, offices of medical professionals, and workplaces.⁴
- In Connecticut, people who wish to change their sex on their driver license to align with their gender must undergo an onerous three-step process and wait for months.
- Establishing a non-binary option on driver licenses helps transgender and non-binary individuals avoid a discriminatory, costly, and challenging process.

THE POLICY IDEA

Connecticut should establish a non-binary option on driver licenses, either through an empty space next to the sex category or an “X” in the place of an “F” or “M.”⁵

Having this legal recognition and identification of their gender identities can help transgender and non-binary people avoid discrimination in schools, offices of medical professionals, and workplaces.

POLICY ANALYSIS

Although Connecticut’s policies regarding driver license sex information are more accessible than those of other states, they are still discriminatory, difficult to comply with, and expensive for most constituents. Beyond missing work and paying fees for legal proceedings, obtaining a doctor’s diagnosis can be hard for those who lack health insurance or access to a mental health care provider. In addition, medical offices often are places of misunderstanding and discrimination for non-binary people. Because they frequently experience discrimination from medical professionals, 23 percent of non-binary people report avoiding medical care.⁷ Unsurprisingly, many also avoid going to medical offices to garner the diagnosis and documentation necessary to change their gender.

The biggest hurdle in enacting this policy is that might slightly increase wait times at the Department of Motor Vehicles. However, there is no clear data on the exact number of transgender and non-binary people in Connecticut; more likely than not, the number is small and would not overwhelm the Department of Motor Vehicles.

NEXT STEPS

A coalition will be necessary to implement a policy requiring a non-binary option on Connecticut driver licenses. Campus outreach will focus on enlisting professors and students of the Gender, Intersectionality, and Women’s Studies Program at Connecticut College for their insights, knowledge, resources, and support. Our coalition will involve LGBTQIA+ people, specifically non-binary or genderqueer people, and a variety of local and regional groups that advocate for LGBTQIA+ individuals and communities, including Triangle Community Center, Connecticut Trans-Advocacy Coalition, True Colors, In Our Own Voices, and the Audre Lorde Project.⁸

The biggest obstacle to enacting this policy will be convincing legislators that the issue matters enough to create and debate a bill over it. Therefore, we plan to use social media to educate and mobilize citizens in Connecticut about the need for this policy change. A lobby day and meetings with state representatives and senators, including leaders from both the Republican party and Democratic Party, could gain the necessary support to propose and pass a bill allowing a non-binary option on driver licenses. In the state of Connecticut, there are only two openly LGBTQIA+ legislators: Jeffrey Currey and Raghiv Allie-Brennan.⁹ However, just because they identify as LGBTQIA+ does not mean that they will support this idea. Meanwhile, six openly LGBTQIA+ Republican candidates ran for office in 2018, which indicates a promising change in Republican presentations of self in the state.¹⁰ Therefore, support for this policy could supersede party lines.

ENDNOTES

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3. Sonde, Kari. "These States Are Driving the Charge Toward Gender-Inclusive Licenses." June 22, 2018, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2018/06/these-states-are-driving-the-charge-toward-gender-inclusive-licenses/>.
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7. Barbour, Krystle. "UMN Medical School Researchers Describe Need for Health Systems to Improve Care of Gender Non-Binary Patients." *University of Minnesota*.
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