

New Legal Resource Available to Michigan's Transgender Community

The Transgender Legal Defense & Education Fund (TLDEF), a national non-profit organization dedicated to ending discrimination against transgender people, has brought its "Name Change Project" to Michigan. The "Name Change Project" provides legal assistance for transgender people who are seeking to legally change their names to reflect their true identities as men and women.

"It is often intimidating and difficult for transgender people to navigate the legal system for a name change," said TLDEF Executive Director Michael Silverman. "With pro bono support from attorneys at **Dykema Gossett PLLC** and other potential Michigan law firms who wish to participate, TLDEF will help transgender Michigan residents through the name change process."

"We're excited to be expanding our 'Name Change Project' into Michigan," Silverman added. "It is vital for transgender people to match their legal names with who they are. Doing so makes it far easier for them to live their lives free from discrimination in employment, housing, health care, and public accommodations. We're tremendously grateful to Dykema for helping us to get the project up and running in metro Detroit, and look forward to further partnerships with attorneys in the state to help us expand to additional areas."

On Thursday, Sept. 24, TLDEF and Dykema will host a training for other Michigan attorneys who would like to volunteer on the on the project.

Dykema has earned a perfect score on the Human Rights Campaign Foundation's Corporate Equality Index (CEI) for the past two-

years. The CEI is nation's benchmarking tool on corporate policies and practices pertinent to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) employees. The firm is joining TLDEF's "Name Change Project" to demonstrate its commitment to diversity and inclusion, while bringing a vital resource to underserved transgender community members who are trying to bring their legal documents in line with their true selves.

"We are thrilled to help improve the lives of transgender people in Michigan through this 'Name Change Project' collaboration with TLDEF," said Heidi A. Naasko, Dykema's Pro Bono and Diversity Counsel. "This firm is dedicated to serving communities in need. Assisting transgender people through the legal process of a name change to become their authentic selves illustrates that commitment."

"Without the correct legal name I feared for my safety. As a transgender woman, being called by the wrong name in public made me a target for transphobic violence," said 28-year-old TLDEF Name Change Project Client Racquelle Trammell. "The project helped me with something I couldn't do alone. Trust me I tried. When I attempted to do this by myself I walked away disheartened, having been talked down to by officials and misunderstood. With this program I had someone who knew the ins and outs of the courtroom and legal system and how to file the paperwork precisely. I truly recommend this program to anyone who has had a hard time going through the name change process. I was able to walk across the stage with associate of arts in June as my authentic self and that was the most affirming thing that has ever happened to me."

"Exploring a legal name change felt very daunting. For one thing, I certainly knew I couldn't afford the out-of-pocket expenses that were required," said 52-year-old TLDEF Name Change Client Kara Marie Ramsey. "TLDEF along with Dykema compassionately and respectfully eased that burden, walking beside me every step of the way and navigating the legal logistics for which I had no comprehension. Prior to

completing my legal name change I had to present a driver's license with my birth name. It was quite humiliating and embarrassing having to explain to various officials why both the picture and name weren't reflective of the woman standing before them. Now, with my legal name change, I have peace of mind, having updated my birth certificate, driver's license, credit cards, voter registration, health insurance cards and many more vital documents. The "Name Change Project" truly saved my life."

"Not having a legal name that reflects who I am as a transgender man has created major challenges including lost job opportunities and being outed and shamed in public places. It's taken an emotional toll and made me feel incomplete," said 25-year-old Jay Eric Theden, who is in the process of changing his name through the "Name Change Project". "I believe that my life will be a lot easier once my name is officially changed. I will finally be able to begin a new chapter as my true self."

Since the program began as a pilot project in 2007, TLDEF's "Name Change Project" has helped more than 2,000 people in nearly a dozen cities including Albany, Atlanta, Buffalo, Chicago, Houston, New York City, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Rochester.