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THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

SENATE BILL

No. 521 Session of 2025

INTRODUCED BY MUTH, CAPPELLETTI, KEARNEY, L. WILLIAMS, SAVAL, STREET, HAYWOOD AND KANE, MARCH 26, 2025

REFERRED TO JUDICIARY, MARCH 26, 2025

AN ACT

Amending Title 54 (Names) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, in judicial change of name, further providing for court approval required for change of name.

The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania hereby enacts as follows:

Section 1. Section 701(a.1) of Title 54 of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes is amended to read:

§ 701. Court approval required for change of name.

* * *

(a.1) Procedure.--

(1) An individual must file a petition in the court of common pleas of the county in which the individual resides. If a petitioner is married, the petitioner's spouse may join as a party petitioner, in which event, upon compliance with the provisions of this subsection, the spouse shall also be entitled to the benefits of this subsection.

(2) The petition must set forth all of the following:

(i) The intention to change the petitioner's name.

(ii) The reason for the name change.

(iii) The current residence of petitioner.

(iv) Any residence of the petitioner for the five years prior to the date of the petition.

(v) If the petitioner requests the court proceed under paragraph (3)(iii) or (iv).

(3) Upon filing of the petition, the court shall do all of the following:

(i) Set a date for a hearing on the petition. The hearing shall be held not less than one month nor more than three months after the petition is filed.

(ii) Except as provided in subparagraph (iii) or (iv), by order, direct that notice be given of the filing of the petition and of the date set for the hearing on the petition and that the notice be treated as follows:

(A) Published in two newspapers of general circulation in the county where the petitioner resides or a county contiguous to that county. One of the publications may be in the official paper for the publication of legal notices in the county.

(B) Given to any nonpetitioning parent of a child whose name may be affected by the proceedings.

(iii) If the court finds that the notice required in subparagraph (ii) would jeopardize the safety of the [person] individual seeking the name change or [his or her] the individual's child or ward, the notice required shall be waived by order of the court. Upon granting the request to waive any notice requirement, the court shall seal the file. In all cases filed under this [paragraph] subparagraph, whether or not the name change petition is

granted, there shall be no public access to any court record of the name change petition, proceeding or order, unless the name change is granted but the file is not sealed. The records shall only be opened by order of the court in which the petition was granted based upon a showing of good cause or at the [applicant's] petitioner's request.

(iv) If the petition requests a name change to conform to the petitioner's gender identity, the notice required in subparagraph (ii) shall be waived by order of the court and the court shall seal the file. In all cases filed under this subparagraph, whether or not the name change petition is granted, there shall be no public access to any court record of the name change petition, proceeding or order. The records shall only be opened by order of the court in which the petition was granted based upon a showing of good cause or at the petitioner's request.

(4) At the hearing, the following apply:

(i) Any person having lawful objection to the change of name may appear and be heard.

(ii) The petitioner must present to the court all of the following:

(A) Proof of publication of the notice under paragraph (3)(ii) unless petitioner requested the court proceed under paragraph (3)(iii) or (iv) and the court granted the request.

(B) An official search of the proper offices of the county where petitioner resides and of any other county where petitioner has resided within five years

prior to filing the petition showing that there are no judgments, decrees of record or other similar matters against the petitioner. This clause may be satisfied by a certificate given by a corporation authorized by law to make the search under this clause.

(5) The court may enter a decree changing the name as petitioned if the court is satisfied after the hearing that there is no lawful objection to the granting of the petition.

* * *

Section 2. This act shall apply to petitions filed after the effective date of this section.

Section 3. This act shall take effect in 60 days.