

**Planned Parenthood of New York City
Testimony on New York City's Birth Certificate Policy**

November 10, 2014

Good afternoon. I am Julienne Verdi, Director of Government Relations at Planned Parenthood of New York City (PPNYC). I am pleased to provide testimony on the New York City Council and the Health Department's effort to change the current birth certificate requirements for transgender New Yorkers. Planned Parenthood of New York City thanks our strong supporter and Chair of the New York City Council Committee on Health, the Honorable Council Member Corey Johnson, for his leadership in convening this hearing.

Planned Parenthood of New York City serves more than 50,000 patients annually in our health centers and is committed to ensuring appropriate care is available for transgender patients. We offer reproductive and sexual health care services and health insurance screening to clients of all genders and have taken steps to make our medical office practices inclusive of all New Yorkers. Our Project Street Beat program serves people who live or work on the streets who are at high risk of HIV infection. Among our services, we provide needle exchanges for hormone needles as well as for intravenous drugs, recognizing that many patients we serve do not have the financial means to stay healthy or pay for needed medical care. We pride ourselves on the medically accurate, high quality, confidential care we provide to all people, no matter what.

As a leading reproductive health care provider in New York City, we operate under the principle that basic health care should enable individuals to lead their lives in the manner that is healthiest and safest for them, understanding that medical decisions are personal ones, best decided by an individual patient and their doctor. Like other reproductive health care, gender affirmative care enables transgender New Yorkers to take control of their lives and bodies.

As a safety net provider, we see each day the realities so many New Yorkers face as they struggle with numerous barriers to accessing care and living healthy lives. Transgender New Yorkers often face discrimination, lack of insurance coverage, provider insensitivity, and lack of awareness of available resources that prevent them from receiving the services they need. Many of these factors may impact a person's decision or ability to undergo gender affirmative surgery. However, for others, it is simply not the right procedure for them. While gender affirmative care may look different for each individual, it should never be a barrier to someone reflecting their true identity and protecting their health. Unfortunately, in New York City, our current policy does just that.

Transgender New Yorkers report that when their identification fails to adequately reflect their true identity it is harder to get a job or access services such as stable housing, job training and other social services. This only makes it harder to lead a safe, healthy life. Nationwide, transgender individuals are disproportionately stopped by law enforcement and are seven times

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more likely to experience physical violence when interacting with police.¹ Transgender women, in particular, are more likely to be stopped by law enforcement under suspicion of engaging in sex work, and are more likely to face further violence and discrimination if their identification lists their gender as “male.” Although the New York City Police Department (NYPD) took a positive step forward this past spring when it announced it was eliminating the use of condoms as evidence of sex work in some cases, we are concerned that transgender women may feel discouraged to carry condoms on their persons, if their government-issued identification doesn’t match their true identity. PPNYC strongly supports policies that support and encourage the use of condoms to keep all New Yorkers safe and healthy. We will also continue to work on the state level in support of a statewide policy to stop the persecutory use of condoms as evidence.

In a city as diverse as ours, we have a responsibility to make sure everyone feels safe to care for themselves. The current policy requiring a costly, sometimes needless operation for a person to obtain identification only creates additional, harmful barriers to a person’s wellbeing. We strongly urge the City Council and other agencies to work together to update this archaic and harmful policy. The U.S. Department of State and the New York State Department of Health have both changed their gender requirements for birth certificates and it is time for New York City to do the same.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important issue.

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Since 1916, Planned Parenthood of New York City (PPNYC) has been an advocate for and provider of reproductive health services and education for New Yorkers. Through a threefold mission of clinical services, education, and advocacy, PPNYC is bringing better health and more fulfilling lives to each new generation of New Yorkers. As a voice for sexual and reproductive health equity, PPNYC supports legislation and policies to ensure that all New Yorkers—and, in fact, people around the world—will have access to the full range of reproductive health care services and information.

¹ *Community Action Fact Sheet for Addressing Hate Violence*, Anti-Violence Project, http://www.avp.org/storage/documents/ncavp_transhvfactsheet.pdf