



PACE

Statement on Changes to the Name Act effective Sept. 1st

November 7th, 2024

PACE Society condemns the recent changes to the Name Act as draconian, regressive, and as a misconstrued and performative attempt to “protect” survivors.

PACE’s Gender Self-Determination Project¹ has helped hundreds of people change their names in the last 7 years. In light of these new policies, we feel it important to speak up in solidarity with many trans, Two-Spirit, and non-binary members of our community who have been overpoliced, and under supported.

These new changes will also restrict the reclamation of Indigenous names, which directly oppose recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The recent amendments to the *Name Act*—specifically the provision banning individuals with criminal records for a wide variety of offences from changing their names—are being framed as a protective measure for survivors of violence. While the intent may seem noble on the surface, the reality is that this policy will cause far more harm than good, particularly for Indigenous, trans and Two-Spirit individuals.

Protecting survivors of violence is a critical priority. However, this blanket ban on name changes for anyone with a conviction from a long list of offences is a blunt, overly simplistic tool that will ultimately fail to deliver meaningful protection while disproportionately harming historically neglected, and over-policed communities. For many, a name change is not just a personal preference but a matter of safety, dignity, and well-being.

It is crucial to acknowledge how disproportionately this will affect trans and Two-Spirit people with criminal records tied to survival—whether through sex work, drug use, living in poverty, being unhoused, or other criminalized activities. By restricting their access to legal name changes, the state is reinforcing a cycle of marginalization that makes it even harder for them to find stability, safety, and acceptance. For trans people, changing their name is more than a symbolic act; it’s a survival tool in a world that already refuses to see them as they are. A name change can be the difference between safety and being outed to employers, landlords, or the public—between being able to live authentically and being forced to constantly defend their identity in a world that is hostile to them.

The logic behind these changes completely erases the lived experiences of trans and Two-Spirit people with criminal records—many of whom are also survivors of violence, often at the hands of the same systems and institutions that are supposed to confer “protection”. To deny them the right to change their name is to retraumatize them.

Prior to these changes, there were already tools in place in the Name Act that prevented dangerous offenders from changing their names to avoid accountability. Prior to September 1st,

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<https://www.facebook.com/pacesociety/photos/pace-societys-gender-self-determination-project-is-funded-by-lush-through-their-/1356042181083966>



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Vital Statistics already had it within their power to deny any name change for what they deemed “an improper purpose, or for any other grounds objectionable”², as well as pre-existing measures tied to fingerprinting, which has always been a component of the application process for name change. Fingerprinting has always tied criminal records to one’s legal name change. It was already not feasible for someone to avoid the accountability of a charge by changing their name, as conditions associated with their release would still apply.

Protecting survivors shouldn’t mean throwing Trans, Two-Spirit and non-binary people under the political bus. Instead of real solutions—like expanding supports for survivors, investing in non-carceral, transformative and restorative justice practices, and addressing the root causes of violence—this policy throws up yet another barrier for people already fighting to exist. We cannot buy into the notion that this ban is about safety; it is ultimately just about control. It will unfairly affect the wrong people, while leaving the structural issues that actually put survivors at risk completely untouched.

These changes will also make protecting those survivors who have fled violence as well as those who testify as witnesses in court more difficult, by obstructing their path to a legal name change that could have protected them from further violence or harm.

If we’re serious about protecting survivors of violence, we need nuanced, community-informed approaches that don’t create more harm. The changes to the *Name Act* do the opposite, and they will disproportionately hurt the most vulnerable—especially trans and Two-Spirit people who deserve the right to exist safely under the names they choose.

PACE stands with all those opposed to these deeply regressive and harmful policy changes. It is disheartening, but unfortunately not surprising, to watch as decisions are made without the safety and well-being of marginalized communities in mind. We hope to see an increase in critical thinking, care and nuance around these changes, and for all trans, non-binary and Two-Spirit folks to be given the autonomy and freedoms that they deserve.

Requests for comment from media can be directed to Kit Rothschild, Community co-executive director, 604-880-5913, kit@pace-society.org

For our members accessing our Gender Self-Determination project, please review changes to the name act found here:

https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/forms/vital-statistics/vsa529_adult_fill_1.pdf and see Page 8 for the full list of criminal charges now prohibiting those convicted from accessing a legal name change.

If you have a name change already in process and are concerned that your application might be affected by these changes please reach out to Sloan@pace-society.org.

² [Allan Schoenborn's name change won't evade accountability: Eby | Vancouver Sun](#)



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PACE Society exists on the stolen and unceded lands of the Hul'qumi'num speaking peoples, specifically the shared territories of the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh (Squamish), Səl̓ílwətaʔ (Tseil-Waututh), and x̣ẉməθḳẉəỵəm (Musqueam) First Nations, and we acknowledge our responsibility to work on solidarity with the nations who have lived on and protected these lands for tens of thousands of years. Due to colonial violence, and historical neglect, Indigenous people are over-represented in sex work, and in the carceral criminal justice system. It is therefore imperative that we center the voices of those most affected by the criminalization and stigmatization of sex work, and actively work towards decolonization.