

FINAL
Statement of Karissa Rothkopf
January 27, 2009

Hi there, my name is Kari Rothkopf, and I am currently 36-years-old. Although I no longer live in the State of Illinois, I was born in Dixon and spent most of my years growing up here.

The reason for my being here today, and for joining this lawsuit, is simple; my birth certificate is wrong, and I am continuing to try and get it corrected. Honestly, I don't believe I understood how important a birth certificate was, but have learned by several unfortunate experiences, that my birth certificate is a fundamental identity document, and a piece of paper, that declares who I am in society.

My purpose for being here today is to both; bring attention to and hopefully correct, the flawed way the rules are being interpreted. The department of Vital Statistics has denied me the ability to correct the gender on my birth certificate. This decision hurts me even though I no longer live here. My inability to correct my birth certificate has cost me money, time, aggravation, and worry. Based on my experiences, I fear that the problems I have encountered in the past will continue to affect my future.

This policy needs to be changed.

At birth, I was identified on my birth certificate as a male, but from my earliest of memories, I knew that was wrong. Even though my body said otherwise, I knew I was a girl, and prayed for almost thirty years that somehow my body would be corrected.

For just as many years, I tried to deny this reality. However, after much research, improved understanding, and finally acceptance of self I took the first steps to live my life, as me.

Under the care of my therapist and a very loving, wonderful physician, I began hormone therapy in 2003. In the years that followed I underwent the surgery that brought the answer to my lifetime of prayer. My body is congruent with the person I always was. I began to express myself publicly in early adulthood and began to express myself full time as a woman in March of 2007.

The steps along this journey were done in consultation with medical professionals. My decision to pursue gender confirmation surgery was one I took with the greatest of care. This was not a spur of the moment decision, but one I made after talking to my therapist, my doctor, my family, and other women such as myself.

The surgery I needed can be very complicated, and very serious. I didn't take the decision of who would perform the surgery I needed lightly. I did exhaustive research of the outcomes of physician in our country as well as around the world. My physician and I were concerned that the procedure utilized by many surgeons in the United States presented a significant risk of medical complications. Following this process, I was able to narrow my choices for the best surgeon for me.

I decided that the surgical procedure used by Dr. Suporn in Chonburi, Thailand was the best medical decision for me. I corresponded with the clinic coordinator, as well as Dr. Suporn. I became absolutely certain that this choice was the right medical decision for me.

I traveled to Thailand in November of 2007, returned in January of 2008 and on December 3, received the correction I had waited for my entire life. This "event" was not just a success; it wasn't just some medical procedure, but a release from captivity and a lifetime of shame. For the first time in my life, my body looked like it was always supposed too.

As I have gone through this transition, the process of changing identification has – for the most part – been smooth. I have been able to correct the gender marker on my driver's license, my passport, and my employment and social security records.

The only document that remains wrong is my birth certificate. This problem would not exist if my gender confirmation surgery had been performed in the United States by a physician that was licensed here.

My decision to seek the best possible medical option for surgery is the reason that my birth certificate fails to identify who I am today.

This policy must be changed. It needs to be changed for the reason I have already spoke of as well as for countless others who pursue surgery outside the United States.

Thank you.