

Statement of
Victoria Kirk
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Good Morning. My name is Victoria Kirk. My friends call me "Tori." I born in the Chicago suburbs and after spending several years in North Carolina and Florida, I recently came back here to the City of Chicago, where I currently reside.

From an early age, I understood that I was female, even though I was assigned the male gender at birth. It is difficult to describe for you the distress and discomfort that I felt growing up and knowing that my outward appearance did not match who I knew I was as a person.

After many very tough years of coping with this discomfort, I took the steps necessary to change my outward appearance to the person that I know I am. It was critical to me, in order to be a complete person and live a happy and successful life that I express myself and look like a woman. This was not by any means an easy decision. And it is not a decision that someone who has not been in this situation and wrestled with distress of being trapped in the wrong body, may ever be able to understand.

Thankfully, my family was supportive with me throughout the entire process.

Making this decision also opens one up to criticism, to embarrassment and to harassment by others who simply do not understand the problems of gender identity. We also know, sadly, that some persons who transition from one gender to another – or who are in the process of transitioning – can be subject to acts of horrible violence.

Knowing all this, it still was important to me to live as the person that I am and to conform my body to that gender.

For this reason, I began to work with a therapist and an endocrinologist to take the first steps – I started a hormone therapy regimen in 2003. In 2005 I began living full-time as a woman. This included wearing appropriate clothing for a woman, and taking on female mannerisms and speech. In 2006, my medical advisers concluded that I was prepared – physically and emotionally – for gender reassignment surgery.

I had to select a surgeon to perform this surgery. This is a huge decision to make. This is not a surgery that can be done more than once if something was to go wrong. I extensively researched physicians and surgeons – on-line and with my therapist. I spoke with surgical staff and with former patients to determine the surgeon who offered the best procedure and techniques for me.

In the end, I selected Dr. Suporn in Thailand. For me, the most important factor was that Dr. Suporn offered a single step procedure for genital surgery – rather than the two-step procedure used by the prominent American surgeons – as well as performing breast augmentation at the same time. In 2006 I traveled to Thailand and underwent these surgeries with Dr. Suporn.

Again, my family remained completely supportive. In fact, my mother was able to go with me to Thailand. She supported me, she comforted me and she took care of me after the surgery.

The surgery was a complete success and I couldn't be happier with the results. It has permitted me to move forward with my life as a healthy and happy person.

The issue of making certain that my identity documents reflect my gender is critically important.

To date, I have been able to change the gender markers on all my important identity documents – including my passport, my school records, my social security records and my driver's license. Only my Illinois birth certificate remains unchanged.

The State's resistance to changing the gender on my birth certificate concerns me greatly. No only does this resistance mean that the State of Illinois will not recognize who I am, it could create significant problems in the future.

As you no doubt know, there have been a number of changes to rules about identity documents since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. One proposal adopted by Congress mandates creation of a national database of birth certificates and requires that states validate one's birth certificate in order to secure a "REAL ID" compliant identification card. Without such a card, I might not be able to board an airplane, enter a federal building or get access to some federal benefits.

Because REAL ID has not be fully implemented – and because I cannot predict all the changes in identification requirements that may lie ahead – it is impossible to know what problems having the incorrect gender marker on my birth certificate might create. But I know that a document that says I am male puts me at risk of embarrassment, harassment and even physical violence.

I know this first hand. A few years ago, I was stopped by a South Carolina state trooper for exceeding the speed limit. While this should have been a routine traffic stop, it quickly became a frightening situation.

Because I had not yet been able to change the gender on my driver's license, I was detained for several minutes while the trooper tried to determine I was in fact the owner of that driver's license. Thankfully in this case it turned out I was allowed to leave with some embarrassment, a ticket, and some very strong advice to have my license corrected.

The current Illinois policy threatens to create several more embarrassing moments for me and for others in the same circumstance. It is time to challenge this unnecessary and dangerous policy.