

Good Day Senator!

My name is Amber Aragi and I am an educator living on the island of St. Croix. To briefly describe myself: I grew up in Connecticut and moved to St. Croix in 2014 to attend UVI. I graduated and immediately started working with the Department of Education. 9 years later, I have since been loving my role as an educator and feel a deep connection to my island community.

Attending UVI and working in the public school system has put me in close connection with the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer constituents in our community. Since I identify as queer, I immediately connected with the LGBTQ+ community of St. Croix. Recent Anti-Trans Legislation has prompted me to reach out to each of you and ask for your awareness regarding the name change policy in the USVI. I am concerned with the process of the name change law, **which requires constituents to publicly share their personal desire to change their name and give others the opportunity to weigh in.**

This information was last updated in February of 2023, based on the organization's interactions with the superior court. According to Transqueality.org, the name change law is as follows:

“To obtain a legal name change in the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI), an individual must **petition the Superior Court of USVI** in either St. Thomas/St. John or St. Croix for a legal name change. The petition should include the current legal name of the petitioner, the proposed name, the residence of the petitioner, the place of birth of the petitioner, and documents demonstrating the identification of the petitioner, including a birth certificate. Upon receipt of the petition, the court will send a list of requirements to the petitioner’s address detailing how to proceed.

The requirements include **two periods of public notice in a local newspaper**. The first notice is referred to as the notice of intent, which will be published for four consecutive weeks.

The notice of intent must include the **petitioner’s current name, the proposed name, and the date of a hearing provided by the court**. At the hearing the court may, in the absence of a **compelling reason** from the public, issue a tentative consent to the proposed name change.

A final certificate of name change is issued upon receiving proof that a second public announcement of the name change is made in a **local newspaper for an additional two consecutive weeks.**”

There are so many steps in this process that impact the privacy of individuals trying to change their name, but moreover impacts the safety of our LGBTQ+ community. Although we’ve made strides as a U.S. Territory, homophobia and transphobia continue to run rampant throughout the Caribbean. The LGBTQ+ community is often forced to mask or conceal themselves in order to be acknowledged and accepted within our population. Working with high schoolers for the past five years, I am aware of homophobia in our communities stemming from youth. Students engage in homophobic slurs to demean others

regularly. Openly gay students are often ridiculed and ostracized from their classmates, and this is why LGBTQ+ individuals often cling together.

This current policy allows strangers to not only be aware of someone's personal business, but give them the opportunity to weigh in on the decision. What qualifies as a compelling reason? **Is the adult's personal desire and consent not enough? Must it be broadcasted to the public for a total of six weeks?**

It also discourages individuals from moving forward with affirming care, which is often the goal of these enforcements. There may have been a time this law was built where the community was so small, it was necessary to be in each other's business. Now that we are able to live in bliss and mind our own business, this law is no longer appropriate or necessary.

Regardless of your personal belief or toleration of others, all constituents should have the right to privacy when making personal life decisions. This includes:

- transgender individuals wanting gender-affirming care
- individuals who no longer claim their last name for family reasons
- individuals updating their last name to a more current one
- individuals correcting a spelling mistake (I had two students with this problem)
- individuals who simply have a reason and want to make themselves **feel more whole**.

**Many of us feel joy at the concept of One Love. However, we cannot say this if it does not include literally everyone. We have a beautiful, welcoming community, and our laws should reflect that.**

We have been ahead of the nation with our handling of Covid-19 and the advancement of our tourism industry in the Caribbean. We cannot regress now. Please do not follow in the steps of the Anti-Trans legislation exploding all over the United States.

I love someone who is transgender. Having her name officially changed is something that will allow her to live her life more openly, freely, and with true happiness.

When we care about **everyone** in our community, we move forward.

Please reach out to me regarding how I can help proceed with next steps. I would love to attend a session or help this become a bill to vote on.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Amber Aragi  
UVI Alumna  
St. Croix Resident  
Educator  
LGBTQ+ Advocate