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## **Transgender Advocacy Group Challenges "Doctor's Note" Requirement in Transgender Name Change Petitions**

**Requirement that NYC Transgender Name Change Applicants Provide Medical Evidence of Need for Name Change Raises Statutory and Constitutional Concerns**

NEW YORK - The Transgender Legal Defense & Education Fund (TLDEF) today filed an appeal in a case that challenges the New York City Civil Court's requirement that transgender name change applicants provide medical evidence supporting their need for a name change. The appeal comes in the case of Olin Winn-Ritzenberg, who sought to change his name because he felt that the name Olin, which is his father's middle name and which he has regularly used for over a year, more accurately reflected his male gender identity than did the female name he was given at birth. The court denied his name change application, and required that he provide a letter from a doctor, therapist, or social worker establishing his need to change his name.

"Requiring transgender name change applicants to supply doctors' notes when they petition the court to change their names demeans them and undermines their autonomy. It violates the law and raises profound constitutional concerns," TLDEF executive director Michael Silverman said. "People's names are fundamental to their identities and the right to change one's name cannot be limited by the government without a compelling justification. Fundamental fairness mandates that every person be treated equally under the law. Transgender people may not be burdened with additional requirements to change their names."

"I was very disappointed when I learned that the court had denied my petition to change my name," Mr. Winn-Ritzenberg said. "My gender transition has been a very personal journey, and no one is in a better position to decide that I need to change my name than I am," he added. "It's also important to me to protect my privacy. I don't want my medical records in a public court file."

Mr. Winn-Ritzenberg sought to change his name through TLDEF's Name Change Project, which provides free and low-cost name changes by matching transgender community members with lawyers in private practice who provide their services free of charge.

"As a transgender person, I just want to be treated with the same dignity and respect as everyone else,"

Winn-Ritzenberg added.

The case is *In the Matter of the Application of LEAH URI WINN-RITZENBERG for Leave to Change His/Her Name To OLIN YURI WINN-RITZENBERG*, Civil Court, New York County Clerk's Index No. NC-000381-09/NY. Brenna DeVaney, Benjamin Edwards, Daniel Gonen, and Janson Mao serve as co-counsel for Mr. Winn-Ritzenberg with TLDEF.

Transgender Legal Defense & Education Fund is committed to ending discrimination based upon gender identity and expression, and to achieving equality for transgender people through public education, test-case litigation, direct legal services, community organizing and public policy efforts.