

Vanessa Joy - Proponent Testimony for HB 467

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

My initial decision to run for office came from a need to preserve the survival of Trans Ohioans. I wanted legislators that have been creating laws against my community to have to look me in the eyes as they did so.

I knew, however, that trans rights wouldn't be something that concerned the average citizen of House District 50. I was going to run on a platform of finding ways to provide universal childcare to all Ohioans, to end homelessness in the State, and to get stronger support for Veterans.

I used the 2023 and 2024 Ohio Candidate Requirement Guides as reference for the steps I would need to cover to collect my signatures.

Between myself and some wonderful helpers, I was able to collect over 60 signatures in total through grassroots organization. My biggest fear when submitting my petitions to the Stark County Board of Elections was that despite my careful vetting, I wouldn't have the 50 valid signatures needed to get on the ballot.

When I received the call that I had enough signatures, but was still disqualified, my heart was broken. The staff at the Board of Elections informed me that due to Ohio Revised Code 3513.06, the fact that I had legally changed my name two years ago, but did not list my former name on my petitions, was the reason I was disqualified.

They also noted that when I submitted my petitions, the staff that recorded them were also unaware of this law. It was only caught during the validation of signatures because one person working at the Board of Elections was familiar with it.

I was not the only person who faced disqualification due to 3513.06. Two other candidates across the state also submitted their petitions being unaware of this law. Stark County disqualified me, but their counties allowed them to continue running. This meant that the law was being upheld unevenly.

To be clear, 3513.06 is not mentioned in the Candidate Guides, nor is there space to place a former name on the petitions. The petitions do not even mention 3513.06.

After my disqualification, I spoke to many people, from reporters to lawyers to heads of the democratic party... none of them knew of the existence of 3513.06.

Secretary of State LaRose's office said that it is up to candidates to hire their own legal teams to review such things, but hiring a lawyer is far out of my financial abilities. It would be a barrier to entry for candidates to have to retain legal counsel.

3513.06 already has an exception for name changes via marriage. HB 467 adds an additional exception for those who have received a name change by way of an Ohio court order.

Changing your name in Ohio requires you to file with the probate court of your county, and then have a hearing in front of a judge whom decides whether or not to grant your request. In my case, Judge Dixie Park conducted a full background check on me, and I was actually not allowed to finalize my name change until my bankruptcy was discharged.

Ohio's name change laws prevent fly-by-night name changes to occur. Anyone who has done so has had to go through an extensive process through a Judicial court order. The Executive and Legislative branches should not have the authority to supercede this order, especially with such an obscure law as 3513.06.

HB 467 is a common sense bill that provides a simple fix to a problem that was largely unknown until this year. I gained National International notoriety from this disqualification. I was talking to reporters nearly daily for over a month. My hope is that no other candidate has to go through what I did. I urge you to pass HB 467, for the good of all Ohioans, regardless of party. Thank you.