

# Community Legal Aid

A non-profit law firm serving the legal needs of low-income individuals and families in central northeast Ohio



[www.communitylegalaid.org](http://www.communitylegalaid.org)

---

## More than a pronoun

by Dawn Spriggs, managing attorney

The last two years have been turbulent for all of us. One group of individuals who have seen particularly big changes is our trans community.

Over the last two years, changes to our laws have sought to make life just a little bit easier for trans individuals. Much of this area of law is driven at the state and local levels. From legal name changes to gender marker changes, case law and reworked administrative processes have come down in their favor.

As an attorney who has spent most of my career working with clients who, by and large, have been forgotten by the legal system, I have seen time and again the impact our laws have on each of our daily lives.

Laws can protect us, or not.

Laws can equalize, or not.

Laws can give us dignity, or not.

I serve as the managing attorney for our intake systems at Community Legal Aid. And in that role, my team and I interact with all 15,000+ applicants who seek us out for help each year.

We work with individuals of every race, gender, color, language, religion, creed -- all low-income and working poor. Most of them feel isolated or forgotten by a system that wasn't designed to be inclusive of them. They call us looking for help, for answers, or just for someone to care about what they're going through.

That thought, of acknowledging what someone is experiencing, is precisely what the legal process changes for the trans community means to us at Legal Aid. We firmly believe that acceptance and validation are basic human rights, and we will fight to ensure and preserve those rights.

There is nothing more fundamental to humanity than ownership over our own lived experiences. Someone's identity is not an outward behavior that must be guarded and policed by legal constructs. It's an internal recognition of one's lived and true self. These changes in Ohio's administrative proceedings offer a step toward that acknowledgement.

This Saturday marks the 22nd Transgender Day of Remembrance, a sobering reminder that justice often happens slowly. But we at Legal Aid are encouraged by the steps that our state has taken, and we are committed to doing our part to make our legal systems more equitable and welcoming.

For the past year, Community Legal Aid has been embedded in a process of becoming a certified Safe Zone organization. Our entire staff has undergone training, and we have been examining our internal processes and procedures to ensure that our organization is a safe place for anyone in the LGBTQ+ community.

Our Pride page on our website, launched earlier this year, includes an interactive timeline of historic legal developments for the LGBTQ+ community, a list of our Pride Partner organizations, and educational resources. And we are committed to continuing to build out this space on our website even further.

For anyone looking for more information on legal information for transgender individuals, we encourage you to check out the following resources:

- [Lambda Legal's Ohio regional webpage](#)
- [Equality Ohio's Trans Know Your Rights page](#)
- Call your local probate court and ask about name changes and/or court-ordered birth certificate corrections
- Apply for help through Community Legal Aid. Visit [www.communitylegalaid.org/apply](http://www.communitylegalaid.org/apply) or call our HelpLine at (800) 998-9454.

*This article is part of Legal Aid's "Big Ideas" series.*