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Transgender Americans rush to finalize name changes, healthcare proxies and estate planning before the inauguration

With rights threatened, transgender Americans rush to get their financial houses in order

By [Beth Pinsker](#)

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Changing a first name and gender marker is a multistep process.

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Nate Shalev got married shortly after Donald Trump was elected in 2016, concerned that their right to marriage equality might go away. Facing the inauguration in January for Trump's second term, with [threats against transgender rights](#) coming from many directions, Shalev's fear again led to action.

This time, Shalev, an inclusivity speaker and adviser based in New York City who uses the pronouns they and them, went to the courthouse to change their first name and gender markers. As a couple, the Shalevs also started a full estate and financial plan.

"When my wife and I got married, we created a new last name together. We had to go through the court system to change it, and that was daunting enough to have to do it as a queer couple," said Shalev, whose company is called [Revel Impact](#). "At that point, I had been going by Nate socially but hadn't switched in the workplace. I wasn't ready to switch all of my names yet."

Even in [LGBTQ-friendly states like New York](#), transgender Americans are what estate attorney [Elizabeth Schwartz](#) politely calls "concerned" or "alarmed," but she knows it's much more than that. "I don't want to sound like I'm downplaying it or making it sound milquetoast," Schwartz said. "My inbox has been blowing up with people who are absolutely freaked out."

Schwartz, who is based in Miami, has been working nonstop the past two months to help clients complete name and gender-marker changes, healthcare proxies, powers of attorney, wills, trusts and confirmatory adoptions. "If you're married and have a child and both parents are on the birth certificate, there shouldn't be a question of who the parents are, but this is a belt-and-suspenders kind of situation," Schwartz said, meaning you have to double up protections.

Certified financial planner [Lindsey Young](#), a transgender woman based in Maryland, has similarly been helping clients build financial plans, including healthy emergency funds, so they have options if they have to move, change jobs or pay more for healthcare. She also is a board member for [Free State Justice](#), a Maryland nonprofit that offers free legal services to the LGBTQ+ community, where she said the caseload has doubled since the election.

"Lots of people had been living their lives and had changed names to friends, but hadn't gotten around to the cumbersome paperwork. There are many steps involved," Young said. "What people in the community may not understand is that your name and identity are important in a broader context — like your credit history and credit score and proving your identity."

Changing your name and gender markers

The rules to change your name and gender markers vary by state, and depend on whether you are an adult or filing for a minor. Even in states that have a streamlined process, it's still not easy — definitely not as easy as changing your last name after marriage. You start with filing paperwork to change a first name, with separate paperwork for gender-marker changes. Some states require a legal “publishing,” but others have waived that step. Once approved, you then have to start making the rounds to change all your corollary documents like your Social Security card, passport, driver's license and medical insurance, all the way down to your frequent-flier accounts.

[Nick Wolny](#), a writer and editor who has a forthcoming book called “Money Proud,” said people encounter issues on par with “4-D chess.” For example, there may be no gender marker shown on your Social Security card itself, but the information is in your file and filters down to Medicare and Medicaid internally and can cause problems. Another is the credit bureaus: “They have last-name changes down, but when it's a first-name change, your credit score gets complicated,” he said.

When Shalev shared their experience on LinkedIn after going down to the courthouse, many people reached out to offer resources. Two national organizations are the [Transgender Law Center](#) and [Advocates for Trans Equality](#), but each state has its own groups to help residents.

Other estate and financial planning

Shalev decided to use the opportunity of getting a name and gender-marker change to do an overall analysis of the [family's legal and financial setup](#). After November, it seemed imperative for the couple to have healthcare proxies and powers of attorney that named each other, and backups in case either was incapacitated.

“When I was younger, I never thought about it. I had a hard time in school. I had a hard time with my parents. Just getting to the next day was the thing. But now I see I have a life ahead of me,” said Shalev, who is now 34. “I love my parents, but I don't want them making decisions for me, because they're not the people who know me best now.”

Once Shalev embarked on the healthcare-rights part of the journey, it became easier to think about all the other aspects of financial management and estate planning. The inauguration deadline is keeping them on track to complete all the tasks.

Changes to laws aren't likely to be immediate on Jan. 20, 2025, at least not in all states. “I don't know if it will be a light switch on Day 1, but it has queer people looking into these things and leaning more to cash and emergency funds,” Wolny said.

Any changes that involve Congress will take time. Changes on the state level may get appealed. Schwartz thinks some of the worst outcomes may be hindered simply by their

logistical complexity. How would it work, for example, to unrecognize marriages? "It's administratively impossible to do," she said. "Will you void the marriages? It's an unworkable solution."

Still, Schwartz is prepared to fight on. "We have to remain vigilant, but when the sense of overwhelm becomes so debilitating, there can be temptation to be paralyzed and do nothing," she said. "Let's focus on what can happen and what you can do about it. Action absorbs anxiety."

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