

Can I change the sex that is on my Social Security record?

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Learn about issues related to the sex identification that is listed on your Social Security record.

1. Common questions

Important information

The January 2025 federal bans on changing sex identifiers on federal records won't affect your Washington state ID or driver's license, including REAL IDs. If this changes, we'll update this information. You can still change the sex identifier on your Washington state IDs. On Department of License issued IDs in Washington, this is called your "gender designation."

The federal bans created many questions about what defines your legal gender. Read our guide about legal gender to learn more about these impacts.

Important Notice: ()During the current federal administration, the information related to federal ID rights and sex/gender on federal records is changing rapidly. An executive order issued in 2025 temporarily banned sex or gender changes on federal identity records and documents. This included passports, Social Security records, tribal and BIA related records, immigration records and other federal records. These bans are being challenged by lawsuits.

As of January 2026 you can't change the sex or gender designation that is listed on your passport or other federal IDs. If you ask to change your passport, no matter what proof you provide, you could be issued a passport with the sex that was assigned on your original birth certificate.

Can I change some of my IDs but not all of them?

Yes.

Which IDs to change, if any, is a personal decision. It's unique to your individual situation and daily life needs. It's specific to your safety and lived identity needs. There can be consequences for both changing or not changing various IDs if you're a person who is transgender, nonbinary, or gender diverse, or who has a sex or gender change. Learn more about these issues and the consequence possibilities of various choices. [Learn more about these issues](#) and the consequence possibilities of various choices.

Many people choose to **only** ever change their state photo ID. You **can** still change the gender that's on your Washington state photo ID, **and** can still choose between 3 genders designation options.

Can I change my name on my IDs but not change my gender on those IDs?

Yes absolutely. Many people who are transgender, nonbinary, intersex, or gender diverse only change their name legally and may never change their sex on any IDs. All identity records and IDs should have a process for changing your name on them. You will probably need to provide a copy of a [name change court order](#) to do so. This includes Passports and Social Security records. Gender diverse people can still change their names on their [Passports](#) (<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/passports/have-passport/change-correct.html>) and [Social Security records](#) (<https://www.ssa.gov/personal-record/change-name>) if they meet the proof requirements. A name change court order is enough to change your name on those records.

Where does my sex show up on different records? Are the records connected to each other?

Your sex or gender can show up, be visible, or be listed somewhere **in** the record on many different records. Some of the records are connected. Usually, records will be the most often interconnected with the information that is on your Social Security record. These are just some of the places your sex or gender can end up in the record:

- Credit reports
- Hospital medical reports
- Background checks
- Tribal rolls and records and Indian Money Account records
- Data searches
- School transcripts
- Benefits account records like for SSDI or SSI
- IDs
- Immigration records

When you are born, doctors, birth professionals, and your parents assign you a sex on your birth certificate or birth record. Historically in the U.S., newborns have been assigned either Female or Male. Recently, some places also began to issue newborns a birth certificate with an intersex designation or other kind of sex identifier if appropriate. In some places, after a person is born, a parent or the person themselves can ask for the sex designation that is on the birth certificate to be changed. The first sex assigned to your birth certificate will be the one that Social Security first used for your records

Are my photo IDs the only IDs that list my sex or gender?

No. Many different identity records or IDs have your gender or sex listed on them somewhere **in** the record **or** on the ID itself.

Your Social Security card **doesn't** list your sex or gender marker anywhere **on the card itself**. But your actual Social Security record **does in fact have a sex listed on the record**. And **that** Social Security record sex designation can be found on

credit reports, hospital medical records, Federal Student Aid records, federal records, background searches, financial records, certain federal records and **many** other places.

Your photo ID is also important and can impact many records that could have your sex or gender listed on them.

Many people choose to change the gender or sex on their photo ID **first** before changing other records. Many people may choose to have their photo ID be the **only** sex or gender record change they make changes to.

You **don't** have to change your birth certificate, Social Security record, Passport, **or any other ID** to be able to choose your sex or gender identifier on your Washington photo ID or driver's license.

Which ID is my legal gender?

None of them exactly are your one true single legal gender.

The concept of "legal gender" is complicated. If you're transgender, nonbinary, intersex, gender diverse, or have experienced a sex or gender change, you might need to make decisions related to changing the sex or gender that's listed on your various IDs and records. If you do, it can help to know what defines your legal gender. Legal gender usually is the sex or gender that's listed on various government IDs and records.

In Washington state, discrimination protections include both sex and gender (<https://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=49.60.040>) and treat them interchangeably. Gender expression and gender identity are included in the state law and are defined in the state law as (<https://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=49.60.040>): "having or being perceived as having a gender identity, self-image, appearance, behavior, or expression, whether or not that gender identity, self-image, appearance, behavior, or expression is different from that traditionally associated with the sex assigned to that person at birth".

Your gender identity and lived experience might not match your legal gender that is listed on your records or various IDs. Your legal gender on various IDs might not define your gender identity and lived experience of your gender and sex. A sex or gender assignment or designation on your records can affect many parts of your daily life. In Washington state, protections include gender identity and gender expression (<https://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=49.60.040>), **not just sex or gender assignment.**

There are **many** records that have your sex or gender listed on them. **No single record or ID exclusively controls what is called your “legal gender.”**

Historically, no single government or agency rule defines what is your legal gender. This is because **so many** various records can affect the sex designations that are used in a person’s daily life.

Even if you get a court order proving your sex change, your legal gender will be defined by each type of record and situation as you deal with them **individually.**

Your legal gender **will be specific to each ID or record type in each situation.**

Here are some examples:

- If you must show photo ID during an interaction, usually in that situation the sex or gender designation that is listed on that specific photo ID will be considered to be your legal gender.
- If your credit is checked, the sex or gender designation that is listed on your Social Security record can show up on the credit report record.
- When you apply for a job, if the employer asks for your sex designation as part of a bona fide job related need, usually you will list the sex designation that is on your state photo ID or whatever photo ID you provide to your employer to verify your identity.
- When you are hired for a job, you will usually have to provide your Social Security card or proof of work permit but those **won’t** have your sex designation on the card itself.
- If your employer does a background check when you are hired that includes checking full records from Social Security or a credit check, then your employer might be able to see the sex designation that is listed on your

Social Security record. This could require a conversation with your employer if that sex differs from the sex that is listed on your photo ID. If you feel that your employer or a potential employer has discriminated against you because of a sex mismatch on your IDs, you can try to file a complaint (https://wahum.my.site.com/FileaComplaintOnline/s/?language=en_US) with the Washington Human Rights Commission (<https://www.hum.wa.gov/employment>). There are strict deadlines for these complaints. You must file within 6 months of the incident. File your complaint as soon as the negative action was taken against you.

- Usually, the gender or sex that will show up on all your school records would be the sex that is on your Social Security record. But for people under 18, the sex that is on your birth certificate can be used a lot too.
- In Washington, you can ask your employer to make sure your badge or anything else visible to coworkers and customers does have your chosen identifiers on it even if your legal records haven't been changed. This applies to **most but not all** employers in Washington. If your workplace has less than 8 employees or is a religious organization, these protections might not apply.
- You can get a state ID or driver's license in Washington and you can choose "X", "M" or "F" for your WA state ID. This is available for adults and teenagers.
- A school might change all the visible records **except** your transcript to match that ID. It can be hard to change school transcripts in some places without a court order or changed birth certificate. Some schools might accept other proof of sex or gender change if you are under 18. If you get a court ordered name change, your school **should change** your name on your transcripts. Even if you don't legally change your name, your school still has to follow Washington rules (<https://ospi.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/2023-08/gender-inclusive-schools-handout.pdf>) about letting you use your chosen name and pronouns at school even if they can't change them on your transcript. You will have to **ask your school about what they need** to change your sex or gender if it is listed on your transcript. Changing your gender on your permanent school and work records can be very complicated for people who are under 18 depending on your situation. If you need help with your school, try to get legal help (<https://teamchild.org/youth-education-law-collaborative/>) from Team Child. If you are a houseless youth, contact Legal Counsel for Youth and Children (<https://lcyawa.org/needhelp>) to see if they can help you with your ID changes.

What defines my legal gender at the federal level?

If you were born in the U.S. **and** were registered for a Social Security card at your birth by your parents or guardians, the sex that was **first** listed on your birth certificate was reported to the Social Security Administration (SSA). **That** sex designation became the sex that was first listed on your Social Security record. The sex that was **first listed on your Social Security Record can be used as** your federal “legal gender”. This is called your “Sex Identification on the Social Security Record”. That sex is the sex that Homeland Security and the Department of State can find out even if you changed it later.

- If you applied for a Social Security card later on in your life or applied for a Social Security during your citizenship process, the sex you were assigned on that application will be your Sex Identification on the Social Security Record.
- If you don't have a Social Security card and live in Washington state, your legal gender would most likely be the gender that is listed on your state photo ID.
- If the only ID that you have ever had is a birth certificate, then the sex on your birth certificate would be your legal gender.

Some kind of record of your sex or gender exists in many places that don't necessarily include a **visible** gender marker or sex designation like your photo ID has on it.

Do I need a court order to change my legal gender?

No. In Washington, you don't need a court order to change the gender that is on your state ID. If you were born in Washington, you don't need a court order to change the sex on your birth certificate.

Where can I get legal help and information related to the federal ID bans?

The information related to the federal bans is changing rapidly. We'll update our guides as information changes.

Organizations around the country are suing to challenge most of the federal bans related to transgender, nonbinary, intersex, and other gender diverse people. You may be able to learn more about how the bans and lawsuits impact you from the non-emergency Legal Help Desk at Lambda Legal (<https://lambdalegal.org/helpdesk/>).

If you're affected by the active-duty military ban:

- Contact the non-emergency Legal Help Desk at Lambda Legal (<https://lambdalegal.org/helpdesk/>). Lambda sued to challenge the military service ban. You can also try to contact the National Center for Lesbian Rights (<https://www.nclrights.org/get-help/>) and the GLBTQ Legal Advocates and Defenders (<https://www.glad.org/know-your-rights/glad-answers/>) (GLAD). They also filed suits against the military service ban.

If you're affected by the federal passport ban:

- Try to get help using the ACLU-WA (<https://www.aclu-wa.org/>) online intake form (<https://intake.aclu-wa.org/>). The ACLU sued to challenge the federal passport ban. If you are otherwise affected by the executive orders related to your passport or international travel, try to contact the ACLU.

If you're affected by the federal Social Security ban:

- Try to get information from the non-emergency Legal Help Desk at Lambda Legal (<https://lambdalegal.org/helpdesk/>). The SSA said it will update its emergency directive in the summer of 2025.

If you're affected by the gender affirming care for youth ban:

- The January 2025 federal ban related to gender affirming care for youth generally shouldn't affect your care in Washington state. Washington law still protects certain gender affirming care for people under 18 in this state. Certain providers might not provide services to you. If you're under 18 and have experienced issues related to your gender affirming care since the federal ban, try to get legal help (<https://www.nwjustice.org/get-legal-help>).
- P-FLAG (<https://pflag.org/>) is challenging the January 2025 federal order with a lawsuit filed by the ACLU and Lambda Legal. You may be able learn more from the non-emergency Legal Help Desk at Lambda Legal (<https://lambdalegal.org/helpdesk/>). If the trans-related care ban for minor youth has impacted your life, try to get legal help using the ACLU-WA (<https://www.aclu-wa.org/>) online intake form (<https://intake.aclu-wa.org/>).

If you're impacted by the federal trans youth in sports ban:

Try to get help using the [ACLU-WA \(https://www.aclu-wa.org/\)](https://www.aclu-wa.org/) online intake form (<https://intake.aclu-wa.org/>). The ACLU sued about the sports ban. You can also try to contact the [GLBTQ Legal Advocates and Defenders \(https://www.glad.org/know-your-rights/glad-answers/\)](https://www.glad.org/know-your-rights/glad-answers/) (GLAD). They also filed suit against the sports ban.

2. Questions about Social Security records

Is my Social Security record my legal gender?

The concept of legal gender is complicated. Learn more about [what defines your legal gender](#). Your Social Security record **is a part** of what impacts your legal gender. The sex identifier that is on your Social Security record **can affect** your other federal sex identification records like passports.

How does my sex or gender show up in my Social Security record?

Social Security cards don't list sex identification on the Social Security card itself. But a sex identification **is listed** on your Social Security **record**. This sex identification **can be seen** by hospitals, during credit checks, background searches, and many other records searches that may include your Social Security number.

Before January 2025, you could change the sex identification on your Social Security record but would be limited to only 2 sex options. To change the sex identification on your Social Security record, you did not need to provide medical or legal evidence of your sex under the most recent rules. You would have had to provide proof of your identity and you may have had to provide proof of citizenship or immigration status.

What if I need to update my name on my Social Security card after a court ordered name change?

Learn more about [changing your name on your Social Security card \(https://faq.ssa.gov/en-us/Topic/article/KA-01981\)](https://faq.ssa.gov/en-us/Topic/article/KA-01981) from the SSA.

3. Mismatched IDs

The sex or gender marker that is listed on all your IDs **can** be mismatched across IDs or records. For example, if your Washington state ID says “X” for your sex designation, it is okay if your Social Security record says “F” or “M”. It **shouldn’t** cause you problems based on the current state of common Social Security Administration (SSA) practices as of June 2025. We’ll update this information if SSA practices begin to change or revert back to sending out what are called “information mismatch letters”.

If you **receive a letter from the Social Security Administration** or any other federal government agency about an information “mismatch” on your Social Security record that could be related to your sex or gender change information, you should try to get legal help right away. **Don’t** ignore the letter. **Respond to the letter as soon as possible**. If it affects your public benefits like unemployment benefits, contact the Unemployment Law Project (<https://unemploymentlawproject.org/contact/>) right away. If it affects your public benefits like SSI or SSDI, contact the Benefits Law Center (<https://benefitslawcenter.org/contact-blc/>) or Northwest Justice Project (<http://www.nwjustice.org/get-legal-help>) right away.

What if I was mistreated because my Social Security gender doesn’t match my photo ID?

Washington state law requires equity in treatment and coverage (<https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=49.60.030>) related to gender and gender identity. If you think your insurance or medical provider treated you unfairly because of your sex or gender identity, you can try to file a complaint about the treatment. If you need to file a complaint, **do it as soon as you can after the incident**. There are strict timelines for these complaints. You can file a complaint with either (or both):

- Washington State Human Rights Commission
(https://wahum.my.site.com/FileaComplaintOnline/s/?language=en_US)

- Office of the Insurance Commissioner for Washington State
(<https://www.insurance.wa.gov/file-complaint-or-check-your-complaint-status>)

Washington has legal protections for gender affirming care and treatment. If you experienced discrimination during healthcare, get legal help (<https://www.qlawfoundation.org/legal-clinics/>).

Here are other things you can do to respond to unfair treatment from your provider or insurance company:

- **File a complaint.** The Office of the Insurance Commissioner will investigate complaints related to gender discrimination in medical coverage denials. You can make a complaint online (<https://www.insurance.wa.gov/file-complaint-or-check-your-complaint-status>).
- **File an appeal with your insurance carrier.** You can appeal a denial of a request for coverage. Ask your insurance carrier how to appeal the denial. Learn more about how to appeal a denial (<https://www.insurance.wa.gov/appealing-health-insurance-denial>).

You can also file a grievance with your insurance or health care provider. You might have to file a grievance first **before** you can appeal the unfair decision.

- **You can try to** contact a lawyer (<https://www.qlawfoundation.org/referrals/>). A lawyer may be able to tell you more about your rights and protections under this law. If you have a low income, you might be able to get free legal help (<https://www.nwjustice.org/get-legal-help>).

4. Changing Social Security records

Can I change the sex identification record on my Social Security record?

No, not currently as of 2026. The Social Security Administration (SSA) issued an emergency rule stating that they no longer have **the technical ability** to process

or issue sex changes for anyone's Social Security records.

Historically, the Social Security Administration **did** let you change the sex that is on your Social Security record **but there were limits**. You could **only** choose a "F" or "M" sex designation for your Social Security record. It didn't matter if your state ID, passport or birth certificate have a gender or sex designation other than "F" or "M" on them. You were still limited to choosing either "M" or "F" with SSA. But you did get to choose either "F" or "M" without having to provide proof of any medical changes. This is called "self-attestation".

The Social Security Administration didn't require proof of gender to change the sex designation on your record. You didn't need to provide a doctor's letter. You shouldn't have been asked to get a court order to change your sex on the record. Instead, you would just choose which of the two sex designation options worked best for you when you completed your Application for a Social Security card form or replacement card. On the form the options are listed as "Sex". That **used to be** the best way to change your federal legal gender if you wanted to affect the most interconnected records.

An executive order doesn't usually have the power to change a Social Security Administration rule like the SSA rule that affects sex change on the record. Usually, SSA rules have to go through public comment periods for that kind of change and publish information about the rule changes on [the SSA public register](https://www.ssa.gov/regulations/recentregulatory.html) (<https://www.ssa.gov/regulations/recentregulatory.html>). **The federal policy that permits a sex identification change on your social security record hasn't changed.** The 2025 emergency message issued by the SSA didn't say that the policy had changed. It said that the SSA doesn't have the ability to change sex on records anymore.

What can happen if I changed or do change the sex on my Social Security card and record? What can happen if I don't?

Currently you can't change your sex on your Social Security record.

If the SSA begins to issue sex changes for their records again and returns to the most recent rules for doing so, then you will be able to change the sex on your Social Security record again.

You might be able to get more information about the SSA ban and how it impacts you if you contact the non-emergency Legal Help Desk (<https://lambdalegal.org/helpdesk/>) at Lambda Legal (<https://lambdalegal.org/helpdesk/>).

If SSA starts issuing sex changes to their records again according to the most recent rules, you will still have to choose either “F” or “M” no matter what your state ID or birth certificate says. They might make you choose the sex that was originally assigned to your birth certificate similar to what the Department of State just did with passports. This information will be updated when SSA releases more information about the rules and the bans.

If you change or have changed the sex on your Social Security record, it shouldn't cause you any ID information mismatch problems if the sex your Social Security record doesn't match other IDs.

Changing the sex designation on your Social Security record can have impacts.

There can be consequences from either changing your sex on your Social Security record or from leaving it unchanged if you are gender diverse. The decision whether to change these records or not is very personal and should be based only on your individual needs and situation.

If it becomes possible again and you do choose to one day change the sex on your Social Security record, **it can have impacts** related to medical insurance coverage and billing.

For example:

When you were born, you were assigned a “F” on your Social Security record. You change your Social Security record to say “M”. After changing your SSA record to “M”, you try to access medical treatments that can usually only be billed to people with “F” on their Social Security record. For example, you might be told that you can't be covered for or receive “female specific treatments” like a mammogram, pap smear, or prenatal care. This can cause issues depending on your provider and insurance plan. It may require you to have to advocate for yourself to get equitable coverage for treatments that you will be denied coverage for. You may have to advocate for yourself to be able to get the treatments **even given** to you if your sex on the record doesn't match the “usual” sex to receive such treatment. There can be financial consequences if coverage is affected because of these

gender specific limitations. If you are discriminated against for these kind of reasons while trying to access healthcare in Washington, you can try to make a report to the Human Rights Commission (https://wahum.my.site.com/FileaComplaintOnline/s/?language=en_US).

Choosing to not change the sex designation on your Social Security can also have impacts.

Many people **never** change the sex that is on their Social Security record. **There can be consequences for this decision as well.**

- If your lived gender expression **doesn't match** the sex that shows up on your credit report for example, that could expose you to bias from a mortgage lender. If you experience discrimination during a credit, insurance or mortgage transaction in Washington, you might be able to file a report with the Human Rights Commission (https://wahum.my.site.com/FileaComplaintOnline/s/?language=en_US).
- It means the salesperson selling you a car could see that you had a physical sex change simply from running your credit report.
- You could be forced to use the sex assigned to your Social Security record at times you don't want to like on hospital ID arm bands in an emergency room. Or otherwise asked about things related to your sex assigned to your Social Security record during other medical interactions like getting x-rays, labs or special medications.
- If your employer runs a background or credit check, they can see the sex that is on your Social Security record. If your employer has other ID copies from you with a different sex or gender on them, there could be issues. This can be problematic and risky for some people.

Will changing the sex identification on my Social Security record affect my Social Security benefits or eligibility?

No. It shouldn't. If it has affected your SSI or SSDI benefits, contact the Benefits Law Center (<https://benefitslawcenter.org/contact-blc/>) right away to try to get legal help.

Will changing the sex identification on my Social Security record affect my health benefits?

Generally, changing the sex identification on your Social Security record won't affect private health insurance in Washington.

For some insurance plans, you could experience coverage approval or denial issues due to a mismatch of sex identifiers that are listed on your medical records and Social security records.

5. If the ban ends

What are my options for changing my sex identification on my Social Security Card record the ban ends?

Prior to the ban, Social Security Administrations records system currently only allowed for 2 sex identifications: Female or Male.

Even if your identity proof document (like your Washington State driver's license) listed a different sex or gender such as "X", the Social Security Administration would only issue sex identification changes from Female to Male or from Male to Female.

If SSA starts to issue changes again, you can request either Male or Female on your record **regardless** of what sex is listed on your state ID or other identity proof document. They **didn't have to match** under the old rules.

If new rules or guidance control the process indefinitely, there may not be any way to change the sex identifier except to change it back to what was originally listed on your first birth certificate. It will depend on what happens with federal rules and laws. We'll update our information when SSA releases new guidance.

How would I prove my sex or gender to change it on my Social Security record?

Under the most recent rules prior to the current ban, Social Security no longer required proof of sex or gender to change the sex identification on your record. You no longer needed to provide a doctor's letter. You would simply choose which of the two sex identification options works best for you when you completed your

Application for a Social Security card (or replacement card) form. On the form the options are listed as “Sex”.

If SSA rules change to match current State Department practices, then sex identification proof can only be your original first birth certificate. The current ban forces your federal IDs and records to use the sex that was assigned to you at birth. The temporary injunction on the passport ban doesn't stop the Social Security technical freeze on processing changes. There is still an effective Social Security ban.

How would I prove my identity?

Social Security requires that you prove who you are when you are requesting a change to your card or record. You would use documents that are current (not expired) and have your name, date of birth or age, and, preferably, a recent photo.

Examples: U.S. driver's license, State-issued non-driver ID card, U.S. Passport. Social Security might also accept an employee or school ID card, a health insurance card (except for Medicare cards), or a U.S. military ID card.

Social Security also requires proof of citizenship and immigration status. Social Security will only accept certain documents as proof of citizenship status.

How would I prove my citizenship or immigration status?

If you are a U.S. Citizen:

- **If you were born in the U.S.,** you would show your U.S. birth certificate or U.S. passport.
- **If you were not born in the U.S.,** you would show your U.S. passport, Certificate of Naturalization (N-550/N-570), Certificate of Citizenship (N-560/N-561), Certification of Report of Birth (DS-1350), or Consular Report of Birth Abroad (FS-240)

What if I am not a U.S. citizen?

You must have shown a current U.S. immigration document, such as Form I-551 (Lawful Permanent Resident card, Machine Readable Immigrant Visa), with your unexpired foreign passport, I-766 (Employment Authorization Document, EAD, work permit), or I-94 (Arrival/Departure Record) or admission stamp in the

unexpired foreign passport.

- **F-1 or M-1 students** must show I-20 (Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status).
- **J-1 or J-2 exchange visitors** must show DS-2019 (Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor Status).

I gathered my documents. How would I have requested the change?

You would have filled out an application for a Social Security card or a replacement card. You could fill it out online and print it from the Social Security card application (<https://www.ssa.gov/forms/ss-5.pdf>).

On the form, choose the F or M for your sex. That is how you change it on your record.

Then you would take your completed application and documents to your local Social Security office. All documents must be originals **or** copies certified by the issuing agency (no photocopies or notarized copies). You would need to give your documents and application to an SSA agent. You might need to make an appointment ahead of time.

You would need to talk with the agent to explain that you are need a new card to replace your old one **because** you are changing your sex identification. You would confirm with the agent that the sex identification has been changed in your record once they have taken your documents. You would have asked if they can print you some kind of confirmation that the record has been changed. This might have been a short letter. Or a print out of the SSA record information similar to a credit report front page.

How much would it cost?

Nothing. Replacing your Social Security card after a change to your record is free.

WashingtonLawHelp.org gives general information. It is not legal advice. Find organizations that provide free legal help on our Get legal help page.