

Change the gender on your Washington driver's license or state ID

Author

Northwest Justice Project

Last Review Date

August 27, 2025

Learn how to change the sex or gender that is listed on your Washington driver's license or state photo ID.

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.

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://lcywa.org/needhelp>) to see if they can help you with your ID changes.

Do I need to have specific medical treatments to change the sex or gender on my IDs?

No, not for your Washington state ID or driver's license. Not for your birth certificate if you were born in Washington. But specific medical treatments (like surgery) could be required by your birthplace to change your birth certificate sex designation if you were born elsewhere.

Our guide about gender affirming medical care protections in Washington has more information about medical care rights.

Does my doctor decide what gender is listed on my IDs?

No. Your lived gender identity can be different than what your IDs and records say. It is okay to get medical treatment for gender related care **and** to also not change any of your IDs. Some people will change their IDs to match their lived gender experience, other people won't. Our guide about legal gender explains how all your different IDs determine what sex or gender is listed on them.

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.

What will happen if I change the sex on my photo ID? What can happen if I don't?

Washington residents can choose one of three genders for their Washington state ID or driver's license. There is no proof of your sex or gender required. You don't need a medical letter or court order.

The most common ID that people will change their sex or gender on is their photo ID. This is the state issued ID that you show the most to other people during daily interactions like at stores and the bank.

Historically, if your photo ID has a different gender or sex on it than your other IDs have on them, it shouldn't cause you any problems legally. But it **can** result in you having two genders or sex identifiers during the same encounter which can cause practical issues and discrimination risks. For example, the lab at your medical provider uses the sex that is on your photo ID but the ER uses the sex that is on your Social Security record. The two sexes don't match between your 2 IDs. This can happen and can be problematic depending on the situation.

If you receive a letter about an information mismatch from Social Security, it could be related to the information that is on your state ID. Get legal help right away if you get one of these letters.

Decisions about what is best on your photo ID should be about your safety, your privacy, and your lived gender expression needs.

How does the REAL ID Act affect the sex that is on my IDs?

Historically, the REAL IDs have been issued by state ID issuers **but** are issued according to federal rules for background checks. Typically, the sex marker ID rules for your REAL ID have been based **on the state** you were in even though federal rules are part of the process. This is the same for REAL IDs here in Washington.

In Washington, your REAL ID or enhanced ID can still say "F", "M", or "X" because Washington Department of Licensing issues the ID. If that changes, this information will be updated. Currently, the State Department says it will accept X

designations on IDs for entering a U.S. border.

If you are worried about how the X designation on your ID might impact your travel, you might want to get legal advice before you leave the country. You can try to get legal help from the non-emergency Legal Help Desk (<https://lambdalegal.org/helpdesk/>) at [Lambda Legal](https://lambdalegal.org/helpdesk/) (<https://lambdalegal.org/helpdesk/>).

What if I need to change the gender on other IDs?

Each type of ID has its own requirements and rules.

Your birthplace will determine if you're allowed to change the sex that's on your birth certificate. If you were born in Washington, you **can** change the sex that's on your birth certificate.

What if I need to change my name on my ID too?

To change your name on your Washington state ID (<https://www.dol.wa.gov/driverslicense/namechange.html>) or driver's license, you must give DOL a copy of your legal name change order.

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 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/>) 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/>) (GLAD). They also filed suit against the sports ban.

2. Sealed name changes and state IDs

If your name change court order was sealed, there's a different process to update your Washington state ID or driver's license with the Department of Licensing (DOL). These extra steps keep your information confidential and **keep you safe**. If you got a sealed name change and you need a state photo ID or driver's license issued or renewed, all of these will be true:

- You must have an interview to give your information to a special DOL staff person.
- You will follow special rules about how to submit your information to ask for a new or replacement ID.
- You shouldn't email the sealed order information to the DOL or otherwise submit it in any way that could be a public record.

It will take longer than other license change and replacement processes. It might involve a different office than your normal local DOL office.

If **you're still deciding** whether to get a sealed name change, you should consider this extra process. If **you already got a sealed name change court order**, prepare for the extra process and for a longer than usual wait for an updated license.

3. Mismatched IDs

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.

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. Process

What are my options for changing the gender designation on my Washington state ID or driver's license?

On Washington state IDs issued by the Department of Licensing, the sex or gender marker is called your "gender designation." In Washington, you can choose one of 3 gender designation options for your driver's license or state ID card. The **only** requirement is self-attestation.

Self-attestation means you don't need to provide any proof of gender change and can choose which gender designation works for you from the provided options.

You can choose the gender designation on any of these Washington State IDs:

- Driver license/ID card
- EDL/EID
- Instruction permit

What are the 3 options for gender designation on state IDs?

The gender designation options for Washington state IDs are: F, M and X.

- At any time after you have a state ID, you can change the gender designation that's already on it to X, F, or M.
- If you're getting an ID or driver's license for the 1st time, you can choose one of the 3 gender designations when you apply for your ID.

Which form do I use and where can I get it?

Use the Change of Gender Designation Request form# 520-043

(<https://dol.wa.gov/forms/view/520043/download?inline>) from Washington Department of Licensing (DOL). You can also get the form in Spanish, Russian and Vietnamese

(https://dol.wa.gov/forms/view?combine=&field_topic_target_id=All&field_language_target_id=All&field_id=All)

You can ask for a copy of the form at any Department of Licensing office (<https://fortress.wa.gov/dol/dolprod/vehoffices/>).

You can complete the form in person at a Department of Licensing office (<https://fortress.wa.gov/dol/dolprod/vehoffices/>) or mail it in to the address listed on the form.

How much does this cost?

- **If you don't need a photo change**, mail in the form and it should be free to get a replacement ID through the mail. The replacement ID should list the gender designation you chose on the form.
- **If you do need a photo change**, submit your form in person at a DOL office (<https://fortress.wa.gov/dol/dolprod/vehoffices/>). You'll pay a replacement fee because of the photo change.
- **If you're getting an ID for the first time**, you'll pay for the ID itself and can choose which gender designation for that ID. ID costs will vary depending on which type of ID you're getting.

Where can I learn more?

The DOL explains more about this rule and process.
(<https://www.dol.wa.gov/driverslicense/genderchange.html>)

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

Change the gender on your Washington driver's license or state ID