

Stamford Advocate, CT, USA

Stamford removes gender pronouns from legislative body's written rules

By Liz Skalka

Updated 4:38 pm, Tuesday, January 9, 2018

STAMFORD — Gender pronouns are a thing of the past in the written rules of the city's legislative body.

The Board of Representatives voted last week to remove "he/she" and "his/her" from its rules of order, replacing them with specific titles, such as president and clerk.

The change was proposed by board member Raven Matherne, the state's first openly transgender elected official, and two other Democratic representatives, Nina Sherwood and Megan Cottrell, who were all elected in November and ran on the Reform Stamford slate.

"The 30th Board of Representatives is the first of its kind in our city that isn't 100 percent cisgender," Matherne told the board Jan. 2, referring to the term that describes when a person's gender identity matches the gender they were assigned at birth. "Indeed, to the best of my knowledge, it's the first board of its kind in our state to count an elected openly transgender member among its ranks."

Matherne was one of several transgender people nationwide elected in November, giving Stamford the opportunity to set the bar in updating its language to be LGBTQ inclusive, members said.

"It's a modernization," said Benjamin Lee, chairman of the Legislative and Rules Committee. "Gendered nouns are no longer used as often in legal documents or legislative documents."

The measure passed unanimously with one abstention by the board's clerk, Susan Nabel, who said she wanted to see how the language would appear throughout the board's rules.

"It's not a disagreement and not a judgment on the spirit of the changes," she said. "It's simply an expression of my desire to actually see the language as it will appear in total in the board's rules and then I'll be able to make an appropriate decision."

The change was voted on during the first full meeting in which new board members tackled city policies.

"This item has been brought forward to address a need, a need our board may be the first of its kind in the state to have the perspective to address," said Matherne, who represents the 19th District in North Stamford.

“This would not change the way or intention of which these rules are followed or carried out,” she said. “It’s an act to acknowledge the members of this board, just as in each of our districts and the city at large, cannot always be described as he or she.”

In another move that recognizes the transgender community, the state may update its building codes July 1 to support gender-neutral bathrooms. The state now mandates that commercial buildings have a certain number of male and female bathrooms, but general-neutral bathrooms don’t count toward that quota.

Norwalk’s Triangle Community Center, a resource for Fairfield County’s LGBTQ population, praised the Board of Representatives this week.

“This measure will make Stamford’s governing body more welcoming, inclusive and accessible to people of every gender identity, as it should be,” Executive Director Anthony Crisci said. “TCC recommends that every institution adopt gender-neutral language whenever possible, as it is an inherent step toward creating a more equal society. TCC is grateful for Representative Matherne’s leadership on this issue and her continued advocacy to make Stamford a welcoming place for all.”

<https://www.stamfordadvocate.com/local/article/Stamford-removes-gender-pronouns-from-legislative-12485130.php>

--