

The notice must be published in two newspapers of general circulation. You may publish the notice in a local newspaper in your county of residence or in a nearby county. An official paper for publication of legal notices may also be used. For example, the local County Bar Association may have a publication for legal notices that you can use.

Proof of publication must be presented at the hearing. A copy of the notice taken from the newspaper may be submitted to the Court as proof of publication. However, if the court finds that the publication of the notice would jeopardize the safety of the person seeking the name change, or his or her child or ward, the Court can issue an order waiving the publication of the notice.

PROOF OF FINANCIAL STANDING

The Commonwealth is very concerned that adult individuals will attempt to avoid financial obligation by changing their names. An adult petitioner must also present official proof that there are no outstanding judgments against him or her. Official proof should consist of a judgement/lien check completed, signed and sealed by the Prothonotary's office. Proof that no outstanding judgments or liens exist must be provided from every county where the adult petitioner has lived during the five years prior to filing of the Petition for Name Change

Disclaimer: We have attempted to insure the accuracy of the information in this pamphlet at the time it was created or revised. However, the law does change, sometimes quickly and unexpectedly. Therefore, you should consult an attorney before taking or refraining from any action based on the information in this pamphlet.

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Adult Name Change

*A brief overview of
Pennsylvania*



**NORTHWESTERN
LEGAL SERVICES**

To apply for services call:

1-800-665-6957

In Erie Area 452-6957

Or Apply Online at:

www.nwls.org

INTRODUCTION

The process for seeking a name change will depend on the person's age and other circumstances. For example, sometimes a name change for a child can be obtained by simply submitting the correct forms to the Department of Vital Statistics or, in the case of an adult after divorce, a written request to the Prothonotary at the Court of Common Pleas in the person's county of residence. Other name changes require a court order issued by a judge, while some people cannot, under any circumstances, change their name.

Only adults who wish to assume their former surname (last name) after they divorce, have the absolute right to change their name. In all other cases involving an adult or a child where both parents will not agree to the change, a judge at the Court of Common Pleas will make the decision. Please note that while Pennsylvania law says it is unlawful for an adult, except when assuming a maiden name after a divorce, to change their name without court approval, the law also says a person may informally adopt and use any name, so long as he or she does so "...consistently, non-fraudulently and exclusively."

ADULT NAME CHANGES AFTER DIVORCE

Many adults want to have their name changed to facilitate a fresh start in life. For an adult who is newly divorced, the procedure is very simple. A form must be prepared and submitted to the Prothonotary's office at the county courthouse. Completion and submission of the paperwork to assume your former name after a divorce is often provided as an additional service by divorce attorneys as part of their representation

in the divorce. Otherwise, contact Northwestern Legal Services for assistance in obtaining the necessary paperwork and instructions. If the divorce was filed in another county or state, the out of county/state divorce decree must be filed with the name change form. There is a small fee for the forms and filing.

OTHER THAN AFTER A DIVORCE

A name change is not so simple when an adult wishes to have his or her given name or surname changed for a reason other than divorce. The state is concerned that an adult may wish to change his or her name to avoid credit problems, a history of criminal acts, or use a new name to commit fraudulent acts. Therefore, an adult must file a petition in the Court of Common Pleas in the county where he or she lives, to obtain a name change. In addition, an adult is required to publicize the fact that his or her name is about to be changed, (unless the Court finds that publication of a notice of name change would jeopardize the safety of the person seeking the name change or his or her child or ward) certify there are no legal judgements or liens against him or her, and give fingerprints to the court for the state police to review to see if there is a criminal record.

People who are convicted of felonies cannot change their names less than two years before their sentence ends. Persons convicted of certain crimes (homicide, sexual crimes, arson, robbery, and aggravated assault) cannot get their names changed.

OVERVIEW OF PROCEDURE FOR ADULT NAME CHANGE

THE PETITION

The Court of Common Pleas may issue an order changing the name of any person living in the county. An individual must start the procedure by filing a petition. **Contact Northwestern Legal Services for help if you want to file a petition to change your name.**

The Petition must contain the following Information:

1. **Petitioner's name, Petitioner's desire and intention to change his or her name;**
2. **Reason for seeking the name change;**
3. **The Petitioner's current residence**
4. **The petitioner's residence or residence for and during the five years before the time when the petition will be filed;**
5. **A set of the petitioner's fingerprints. Fingerprint cards are obtained at the Prothonotary Office of Court of Common Pleas and taken to the State Police for fingerprinting.**
6. **Whether Petition has any prior criminal record;**
7. **Whether there are any liens or judgments of record filed against Petitioner.**

PUBLICATION

After the petition has been filed, the Court will enter an order directing the petitioner to give notice of the name change filing. The Court will order that the petitioner publish the notice. The purpose of publishing the notice is to let the community know that you are seeking to have your name changed. Anyone who would have a lawful objection to the changing of your name would be given notice by the publication.