

10/01/2014

Dear Facebook:

We, the undersigned, represent a diverse coalition of artists, immigrants, domestic violence survivors, activists, transgender people, and others who have a sincere need to be able to use our chosen names on our Facebook profiles.

We share Facebook's desire to build community, create authentic connections, and celebrate diversity. We applaud Facebook for its strong internal non-discrimination policies and its evolving policies that ensure people of all genders are able to express themselves on their profiles. Now, we request that another Facebook policy evolve to ensure all of us are able to be our authentic selves online.

Facebook's requirement that users provide a form of identification to prove their "real names" is unfair and disproportionately impacts our already vulnerable communities. This policy lends itself to abuse; some people are using this tool to target and harass our communities with the intent of erasing our identities.

Many people need to use a chosen name in order to feel safe or to be able to express their authentic identity online. While drag queens have experienced a rash of reports of being in violation of the "real name" policy, many others remain at risk of being reported.

- Transgender people are often unable to legally change their names. Requiring them to show identification that may not accurately reflect their gender identity can result in humiliation. Worse, requiring them to display a name that doesn't reflect their gender identity can subject them to violence and harassment.
- Performers of all kinds may need their stage names to be the one that is public facing.
- Immigrants may have trouble producing identification documents, or some people may use Anglicized names in their everyday lives.
- People from communities around the world may use a pseudonym to avoid persecution.
- Domestic violence survivors often use chosen names as a layer of safety for peace of mind.
- People of faith sometimes use religiously based names that do not match their legal name.
- Teachers, therapists, social workers, judges, and many others have personal reasons for needing to use a chosen name on Facebook.

In order to protect and celebrate all of our communities, we are united in our ask that Facebook:

- publicly commit to fixing the policy to ensure we can all be our authentic selves online;
- end the requirement for people to show forms of identification; and

- establish clear and easy procedures for users to appeal account suspension.

Facebook's "real name" policy also raises serious free speech concerns. All people should feel safe using their preferred identity when speaking, online or off, and the US and California constitutions guarantee the right to speak anonymously or with a pseudonym. We encourage Facebook to take our society's free speech traditions into account when reexamining its name policy and its mechanisms for hearing user appeals related to speech.

Thank you for your continued engagement with our communities. We look forward to celebrating Facebook's revised policies soon.

Sincerely,

National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs
National Lawyers Guild
Transgender Law Center
ACLU of Northern California
Electronic Frontier Foundation
Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence

AIDS Legal Referral Panel
African American Office of Gay Concerns
Arkansas Transgender Equality Coalition
Bay Area Bisexual Network
Billy DeFrank LGBT Community Center
Bro-Lesque - Philadelphia
Brown Boi Project
Canvas for a Cause
Center for "The Dialogue of cultures XXI", Kyiv, Ukraine
Cin City Burlesque
Columbus Burlesque Collective
Community United Against Violence CUAV
Disabled Students Association- SFSU
Equality Louisiana
Equality New Mexico
Gateway Sisters Of Perpetual Indulgence

Gender Exploration Society, Tulane
Gender Health Center
Gender Rights Advocacy Association of NJ (GRAANJ)
Get Equal
Global San Francisco
Harvey Milk LGBT Democratic Club
Horizons Young Professionals for Equality (HYPE)
Imperial Sovereign Court of the Emerald Empire
LGBT CENTER SF
Louisiana Progress
Louisiana Trans Advocates
Louisiana Trans Advocates
New York Association for Gender Rights Advocacy (NYAGRA)
New York City Anti-Violence Project
Queer Cultural Center
Queer Oral History Project
SF Imperial Court
Salvadoran American National Network SANN
San Francisco LGBTQ Speakers Bureau
Seattle LGBT Commission
Social Media Exchange (Beirut, Lebanon)
Social Outreach Seattle
Somos Familia Valle
Southerners On New Ground
St. James Infirmary
SWOP - Bay Area
Tennessee Transgender Political Coalition
Texans United for Families
Transgender San Francisco (TGSF)
Trans March
Trans March, TDoR
Trans Youth Equality Foundation
Transgender Resource Center of New Mexico
W.O.M.A.N., Inc.
Wonderdog rescue