THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
NEW YORK, NY 10007

TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO SIGNS HISTORIC LEGISLATION ADDING THIRD GENDER CATEGORY TO BIRTH CERTIFICATES ISSUED BY THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Tanya, thank you. I think it's so important for people to hear what this means and for people to understand this is about New Yorkers getting to be who they are, getting to live in peace, getting to fulfill their destiny as they see it. And Tanya, thank you for all of your leadership. Let's give her a round of applause.

[Applause]

I want to thank everyone for being here – a special thank you to everyone at SAGE – 40th anniversary year for SAGE. Thank you for all you have done.

[Applause]

Michael Adams, thank you for your leadership. I want to thank two members from my administration who are with us. One is standing behind – the Chair of the Human Rights Commission of New York City, Carmelyn Malalis, thank you for your good work.

[Applause]

The other is seated – she is our acting Health Commissioner, but even the Health Commissioner can have a back problem. So, Dr. Oxiris Barbot, thank you for all of your leadership.

[Applause]

You really need to see a doctor about that –

[Laughter]

Okay, I have some questions, everybody. Does everyone have the right to their own identity?

Audience: Yes.

Mayor: Sorry, I can't hear you. Does everyone have a right to their own identity?

Audience: Yes!

Mayor: Does everyone have a right to be themselves?

Audience: Yes!

Mayor: Should everyone be able to tell their government who they are and not the other way around?

Audience: Yes!

Mayor: That's why this is so important. You've answered all of the questions. Look, I want to just put this in some quick perspective. You know, as a country we have something that actually makes us unique – we have a founding document that talks about life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. How can someone have happiness if they cannot be who they are? Think about it – how can someone be free and have liberty if they're not recognized for who they see themselves to be.

Right now, let's be clear, even though that's in our founding document, the federal government does not allow any form of ID that I've ever heard of, at least – certainly not a passport – to recognize the whole range of identity, and our State government doesn't either. And so it's up to New York City and it's up to localities all over this country to answer this, to give people a right they should have because we believe in self-determination, don't we? Isn't that what it's all about?

Audience: Yes!

Mayor: Self-determination, self-expression – and there is a lot of talk about freedom, this is an essential example of freedom. If you're denied the right to express yourself, you don't have freedom. If you have to sit by the door of the classroom worried that someone's going to typify you the wrong way and deny your identity, you don't have freedom. You don't feel free. You can't feel free if you're not recognized for who you are.

So, I think a lot of people will watch the coverage of today's bill signing and some will immediately feel connected to this and understand it and appreciate it, others will have some real questions. I say to them, think in terms of freedom. I don't know anyone who doesn't want freedom. Everyone has their own experience, but I think pretty universally people want freedom. Imagine if you were told you had to be something you did not consider yourself to be, how would that feel? Imagine there was literally no space given for your own identity as you saw it – that's been the reality for too many New Yorkers, too many Americans. It doesn't have to be that way.

So if anyone hears the word freedom, regardless of their ideology or their partisan affiliation – if they hear the word freedom and they like the sound of freedom, here's just another powerful example of actually respecting that right to freedom in everyone.

[Applause]

And if we don't respect that right, then what happens? People go unseen, they go unacknowledged, disrespected, disregarded, they are treated like they don't belong. One thing that New York City is really good at is being a place for everyone. One of the things we are renowned for all over the world is it's a place where everyone can belong – we're proud of that, it's why we are the greatest city in the world.

Today, we take another step in being our true selves as New Yorkers and embracing everyone. For so many folks who for so many years had to deal with documents that did not reflect their reality, I can only begin to imagine what that challenge was like, what that pain was like. We want to make that right today. We want to make sure that people are not dependent on the subjective judgement of anybody else, including a doctor. And I agree entirely – respect the medical profession greatly, but doctors come with their own perspectives. This is something that's not about what an individual doctor thinks, it's about what someone feels about themselves and knows about themselves. That's why Intro 954 is so important.

This legislation is very clear – it says you can identify yourself as a male, female, or with an X on a New York City birth certificate. It's straightforward about saying that each person defines that for themselves. And this City, which has been the wellspring of the movement for equality for so long, the home of Stonewall and the modern LGBTQ movement, it is fitting that we lead the way here again. The 50th anniversary of Stonewall nears, as you heard. And that's something that makes us all very proud and very hopeful. Even when we go through days like we have in this country – just the last few days – it could be painful, it could be discouraging. We should never be discouraged because we only have to think back a half-century ago when brave people stood up. They didn't know they were making history. They didn't know what they did in those days would reach us all the way until today. We have to have that same courage, that willingness to fight through every struggle and know it will help those farther down the road – and this is an important moment. And I want to say to anyone who feels they have been misunderstood or ignored or mistreated because of their choice of their own identity, a simple message – you be you. Live your truth and know that New York City will have your back.

[Applause]

Before I call up some other distinguished individuals who have all been part of bringing this day together, just a few words in Spanish –

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

Now, the person who I like to introduce the most – she has fought for freedom for people to define themselves and be respected for themselves literally her whole adult life. And I can say

from a position of absolute, perfect objectivity, we could have no greater First Lady than Chirlane McCray.

[Cheers]

First Lady Chirlane McCray: Thank you, Bill. What an exciting day this is. I came to New York City in July of 1977 – there was no gay community center, there was no SAGE – was not even a dream. And today, I would never, ever have imagined – just, never – that we would get to this point. So, for those of you who think that we haven't had any chance in the last 40, 50 years – well, guess what? I'm here to say, it is coming. It may not be fast enough, but it's coming. And I want to thank everyone who fought so hard, so long to make this moment possible. A special thank you to all the transgender and gender non-conforming, non-binary leaders and activists who are here today. This would not be happening without all of you and I am so proud to stand with you as New York City takes this major step forward.

Of course, the truth is, it's long overdue. Our city has always been home to people who do not identify as the gender listed on their birth certificates. We know that's true. There have always been New Yorkers who cannot check a box that says male or female. But government has been painfully slow to see these New Yorkers – to validate their reality. And the frustration and emotional distress that comes with going unseen and being ignored is very real, and dangerous.

That's why today matters. And no one could explain that better than Tanya already has. Thank you, Tanya.

[Applause]

Today, we're sending a clear message to you and to every transgender and gender non-binary New Yorker – we see you, we hear you, we are with you.

A birth certificate is so much more than a piece of paper. It is the very first acknowledgement of who people are. What's the first question people ask when you get born? Right? What's the question? Y'all can answer – is it a boy, is it a girl – right? That's the very first question. From starting a job, to finding a home, to getting a passport, it is an essential tool for navigating society with credibility and, most importantly, with respect. There's nothing more basic than that.

Now, for the first time, every New Yorker will be able to get a birth certificate that reflects and affirms their lived reality, and helps them go through life with the same dignity that is afforded everyone else.

And we will not stop there. We will strive to extend that dignity to every aspect of life. We will stand strong against any attempt to deny anyone who identifies as part of the LGBTQ community the safety and respect they deserve as humans.

We are all humans, right?

[Cheers]

We're all humans?

[Cheers]

Humans?

[Cheers]

That's better. Well, with the NYC Unity Project, we will partner with you to continue building a better future for our city's LGBTQ community, young people, and make New York City the most LGBTQ-affirming place in the world.

[Applause]

I mean, why not here, right? We started it all. So, thank you all again. I am so proud to stand here with you today. Onward!

[…]

Mayor: Well, people have worked very hard for this day, struggled very hard for this day, wasted a long time, so I have a question for everyone. Is it time to sign this bill?

Audience: Yes.

Mayor: What's with the crowd – let's try again. Is it time to sign this bill?

Audience: Yes!

Mayor: Alright, now I'm convinced.

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