

MISSOURI ADULT NAME CHANGE INSTRUCTIONS

- STEP 1: For an adult the name-change procedure starts with filing a petition with the court in the county where the person resides.
- STEP 2: Within a month or so after the petition is filed, the petitioner and his or her attorney must appear in court for a brief hearing. Most adult name changes are granted by the court without question at this hearing.
- STEP 3: If the judge approves the name change at the hearing, the judge signs a name-change decree.
- STEP 4: The final legal step in the process is that notice of the court-approved name change must be published in a local newspaper once a week for three weeks.
- STEP 5: After a name change is granted, the new name should be used exclusively. The person will need to notify numerous persons and agencies of the change, including tax authorities, voter registration office, drivers license and vehicle registration office, Social Security Administration, banks and creditors, most of whom will want a copy of the name-change decree.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- Q: Is there any reason why my name change request might be denied?
- A: The court has limited discretion in denying name changes. Missouri law says that the court can deny a change only if there is evidence that third parties, including the state, might be harmed. For example, the court could deny a name change:
- If the petitioner seeks the change to avoid paying debts owed to creditors. (This is an example of a change harmful to third parties other than the state.)
 - If the requested new name is bizarre, obscene or offensive, or is the same as the name of a governmental entity. (These are considered harmful to the state or public at large. Imagine the potential mischief if a person's name were legally changed to the "Department of Revenue".)
- The narrow discretion of a court to deny a name change is illustrated by a case in which the trial court's refusal to change a petitioner's first name to "Sunshine" was reversed on appeal. The appellate court held the trial court abused its discretion because the requested name was not particularly bizarre, obscene or offensive, and there was no evidence of harm to any third parties.
- Q: What do I need to do to change my name on my birth certificate?
- A: Occasionally a person using the court-approved name-change process also wants his or her birth certificate altered. The Missouri Bureau of Vital Statistics is authorized to amend a birth certificate upon receipt of a certified copy of a name-change decree.