

Passport gender choice made easier

Written by ABC News | Sarah Dingle
Thursday, 22 September 2011 10:08

People will be able to choose what gender they want to be listed as on new Australian passports, even if they have not undergone a sex change.

In the past, Australians could only change their gender on their passports if they had had a sex change operation or were travelling to get one.

Now the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has introduced new guidelines so that instead of surgery, all that is needed is a letter of support from a medical practitioner.

The changes mean Australians can identify their sex of choice and select Male, Female or X. The 'X' choice is available to intersex Australians.

Labor Senator Louise Pratt says international travel can be downright dangerous for people whose appearance does not match the gender listed on their passport.

"There have been very many cases of people being detained at airports by immigration in foreign countries simply because their passports don't reflect what they look like," she said.

"It's very distressing, highly inconvenient and frankly sometimes dangerous."

Senator Pratt is the first member of Federal Parliament to have a transgendered partner, who was born female but has transitioned to male.

"This is really pleasing for people like him. It now means we can travel overseas without any problems."

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But DFAT warns the issue can cause problems when crossing some international borders.

Passports are considered secondary documents of identification.

Birth certificates are the most important and they come under state law, which in most states says they cannot be changed without accompanying surgery.

Connor Montgomery has undergone hormone treatment and now lives as a man. He welcomes the passport changes, but says the national right to alter a birth certificate has to follow.

"You know, having that little bit of paper, to some people it seems insignificant but for us it is so important, it feels like the last missing piece of the jigsaw," he said.

Senator Pratt agrees there is a need for national reform.

"It is a very uneven regime right around the country in terms of people who can get their gender identity recognised in the state that they live in and there's really, I think, a need for coordinated reform," she said.

"I would certainly hope that in the review of the anti-discrimination laws, the consolidation of the act that is happening at the moment, that both sexuality and gender come forward for recognition as grounds for discrimination."

And she is hopeful Labor backs this commitment.

"I'm certainly pushing that way and I'm quite hopeful."

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