

Beat: News

Judge approves name change for soldier convicted in WikiLeaks case

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USPA News - U.S. Army private Bradley Manning, who was convicted of providing classified material to whistle-blowing website WikiLeaks, on Wednesday had her name legally changed to Chelsea Elizabeth Manning, an initial victory towards her goal to be treated as a woman. Leavenworth County District Judge David King granted a petition to allow Manning, who is serving a 35-year prison sentence at the U.S. Disciplinary Barracks at Fort Leavenworth in Kansas, to legally change her name from Bradley Edward Manning to Chelsea Elizabeth Manning.

Born as a man, she was twice diagnosed with gender dysphoria by military psychiatrists. "The Court finds that the Petitioner, Bradley Edward Manning, is entitled to change name from Bradley Edward Manning to Chelsea Elizabeth Manning," Judge King said in his ruling. "It is further ordered that, upon proper application, an amended or substitute birth certificate be issued to reflect the Petitioner's new name, Chelsea Elizabeth Manning." Manning, in a statement released through her supporters, said it was an "exciting day" after the judge granted her petition. "I've been working for months for this change, and waiting for years," she said, adding that many U.S. laws and procedures often do not consider transgender people and prevent them from doing simple day-to-day things. "It's worth noting that in both mail and in-person, I've often been asked, 'Why are you changing your name?'," Manning said. "The answer couldn't be simpler: because it's a far better, richer, and more honest reflection of who I am and always have been - a woman named Chelsea." The legal name change is an initial victory in Manning's attempts to be moved to a women's unit, to receive specialized gender counseling, and to undergo hormone replacement treatment. "Unfortunately, the trans* community faces three major obstacles to living a normal life in America: identity documentation, gender segregated institutions, and access to healthcare," she said. "And I've only just jumped through the first one of these hurdles." Manning said obstacles such as showing an ID card, going to the bathroom, and not receiving transgender-related healthcare are preventing transgender people from living better, more productive and safer lives. "Hopefully today's name change, while so meaningful to me personally, can also raise awareness of the fact that we trans* people exist everywhere in America today, and that we have must jump through hurdles every day just for being who we are," she said. But the Pentagon, responding to Wednesday's court ruling, immediately indicated it had no plans to start treating Manning as a woman. "This court action is only a name change, and will have no other effect on his current status other than the name in his records," Army spokesman George Wright said. Manning said she was evaluated and informed by the military in August 2013 that they had come up with a proposed treatment plan for her gender identity disorder. "I have not yet seen their treatment plan, and in over eight months, I have not received any response as to whether the plan will be approved or disapproved, or whether it follows the guidelines of qualified health professionals," she said. Lauren McNamara, a trans-rights advocate who Manning befriended prior to arrest and who testified at Manning's trial last year, welcomed Wednesday's court ruling. "Being recognized by the chosen name that reflects who you are is a matter of basic dignity for all transgender people, and this right must be respected," McNamara said. Manning was convicted of giving around 750,000 classified U.S. documents to WikiLeaks, setting off an unprecedented diplomatic disaster for the United States. The material leaked also included video footage, including a video that showed U.S. forces killing two Reuters journalists and numerous Iraqi civilians. Manning was sentenced to 35 years imprisonment last year.

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