



ERIN ROCK

an undisputed role in contributing toward favorable outcomes, and comprises Real Life Experience, legal name and sex change on identity documents, as well as medically necessary hormone treatment, counseling, psychotherapy and other medical procedures," WPATH wrote.

"The medical procedures attendant to sex reassignment are not 'cosmetic' or 'elective' or for the mere convenience of the patient. These reconstructive procedures are not optional in any meaningful sense, but are understood to be medically necessary for the treatment of the diagnosed condition."

One transgender city employee spoke to the issue of medical necessity from a personal perspective, via an anonymous statement read aloud during the meeting. He explained that the specific exclusion of medically necessary care for transgender people not only prevented him from using his health benefits to cover the cost of surgery, but also barred him from using his flexible spending account, due to similar exclusions in the federal tax system.

"It is important to note that trans-related care is a treatment process that involves the support and approval of a team of medical professionals," the employee wrote. "I can also tell you that these services are absolutely vital to maintain a healthy, productive life. I am lucky enough that I was in a position to attain this care on my own. My ability to get this care enabled me to thrive as a person and function more effectively in my job. But not every transgender city employee is this lucky."

While some critics have expressed concern about the potential cost to taxpayers, the mayor and commissioners made clear that the ultimate costs will be negligible, and a tiny

Basic Rights Oregon's Jeana Frazzini (far right) was among those in attendance at the June 8 Portland City Council meeting.

percentage of the amount currently being spent on the city's health plan.

According to Adams, the city is setting aside \$32,302 to cover the cost of extending coverage for sex reassignment surgery. That figure is about .08 percent of the \$41,615,000 the city expects to spend on its health care plan for 2011-12. The mayor anticipates that the actual cost to the city will be less than the budgeted amount, as has been the case in other jurisdictions.

"This is not about costs and benefits," said Promise King, executive director of the Oregon League of Minority Voters. "This is about the sanctity of human life and respect for human dignity. So we cannot sidestep that as we talk about policy."

Commissioner Dan Saltzman agreed that the price tag is not the most important issue. After hearing testimony about the high rate of suicide among transgender people, he said the cost is worth the benefits.

"This is going to be one of my proudest legacies: helping people to live as who they are in all aspects," Saltzman said. "This is a small price to pay to help people live better lives."

Following the city council's unanimous vote, Adams put down his gavel and those gathered in support rose to their feet and cheered.

"I cried. I had emotion. I was nervous," attendee Wyatt Riott confessed after the decision. "It's also just exciting to see people come out for this." ☐



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