

## TLDEF Files Federal Lawsuit Against Houston County, Georgia for Excluding Medically-Necessary Transgender Health Care in Employee Health Plan

### Suit on Behalf of Sheriff's Deputy Anna Lange, a Dedicated Public Employee Who Has Served Houston County for 13 Years

"My federal lawsuit with TLDEF aims to right this wrong, restore my health care, and pave the way for other trans people in the South to receive the vital care they need."  
- ANNA LANGE



(MACON, GA - October 2, 2019) - Transgender Legal Defense & Education Fund (TLDEF) today [filed a federal lawsuit against Houston County](#) for excluding medically-necessary transgender-related health care from its employee health plan. The suit is on behalf of Anna Lange, a Houston County, Georgia Sheriff's Deputy who has been on the job for 13-years. The county's policy violates both the Constitutions of the United States and Georgia, and federal anti-discrimination laws.

The suit was announced at a press conference in front of the United States District Court for the Middle District of Georgia in Macon.

"I have devoted more than a decade of my life to a job that I love with the backing of supervisors and colleagues who truly respect my work," said **Sergeant Lange**. "Despite my dedicated years of service, the County has singled out and excluded the medically-necessary care that I need simply because I'm transgender. I just want to be treated fairly and earn the same benefits as my co-workers who serve on the force."

Sergeant Lange began her career with the Sheriff's Office in September 2006. In 2017, she began living openly as a woman. She came out to both colleagues in the workplace and community members and has successfully continued her life and career as Anna since that time. Her physician diagnosed her with gender dysphoria, for which the treatment is social and medical gender transition, as recommended by the [World Professional Association for Transgender Health \(WPATH\)](#). Houston County denied her request for coverage of this medically-necessary healthcare for the sole reason that they refuse to cover surgical and medical care related to an employee's transition. Attempts by Ms. Lange and her attorneys to persuade Houston County to reconsider the exclusion, including testifying before the Houston County Board of Commissioners, were rejected.

"Excluding transgender-related health care from employee health plans violates Georgia and federal law," said **TLDEF Senior Staff Attorney Noah Lewis**. "When we inform private employers that it is unlawful to block transition-related care, most voluntarily remove the exclusion. The Houston County Board of Commissioners had the opportunity to treat all of its employees equally and vote to end this unfair treatment of county employees and their families. They failed to do so. Sergeant Lange had no other choice than to bring this federal case."

Houston County's transgender-related health care exclusion is a violation of the state and federal constitutional right to equal protection and other laws, including Title VII of the Civil Rights Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Transgender-related care is recognized as medically-necessary by insurance companies and is covered under the federal employee health benefits plan and Medicare. The University System of Georgia [recently settled a similar case](#) against it, agreeing to remove the transgender exclusion and pay the plaintiff employee \$100,000. This care is also widely covered by private employers. The American Medical Association, the American Psychological Association, and the American Psychiatric Association among other [expert organizations support insurance coverage](#) for transgender-related care. The IRS also recognizes such care as being both medically-necessary and tax-deductible.

#### LGBTQ Equality Groups in Georgia are voicing support for Sergeant Lange:

"Anna Lange has devoted 13 years to serving the residents of Houston County. Now, in her time of need, Houston County has turned its back on her," said **Chanel Haley, Gender Policy Manager of Georgia Equality**. "All people deserve the right to healthcare, including transgender people. Transgender-related surgeries and other procedures are a vital part of the journey to health and well being for many trans individuals. Insisting on medically necessary care is not an unreasonable expectation. By refusing to cover this care, the Houston County Commissioners are trampling trans rights and ignoring one of their own."

"Sergeant Anna Lange is an outstanding member of the community who has continuously put her life on the line for 13 years of committed service. Despite this dedication, Houston County has chosen to discriminate against her by denying the medically-necessary transition-related care she needs," said **Zahara Green, Executive Director of TRANScending Barriers Atlanta**. "Health care is a human right for everyone, including transgender people. The people of Houston County expect their elected officials to provide respect, dignity, and fairness to all those who ensure their safety every day. The time is now for Houston County to provide sergeant Lange with equal access to health care."

"Medically necessary treatment is a right not a privilege. By denying coverage for Sergeant Anna Lange, Houston County is showing complete disregard for her health and well being," said **Kayla Gore, Southern Regional Organizer for Transgender Law Center @SONG**. "Rejecting an employee's medical needs is negligent and reckless. We expect our elected officials to serve all those entrusted to their care, including transgender people. Through this shameful action, Houston County has failed one of its most respected leaders. We commend Sergeant Lange for speaking out against this injustice and pushing for positive change."

TLDEF attorneys **David Brown** and **Noah Lewis** filed this case with the law firm, **Willkie Farr & Gallagher LLP** in New York City (Attorneys Wesley Powell, Mary Eaton, and Jill Grant); the law firm **Cooper, Barton & Cooper** in Macon, Georgia (Attorneys Kenneth Barton & Devlin Cooper); and **Professor Kevin Barry** of the Quinnipiac University School of Law Legal Clinic in North Haven, Connecticut.

## Media Contact

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