

Canadians X sex designation

By Sarah Sobanski

People of Ontario no longer have to choose a gender binary for government issued identification.

Ontario health cards no longer display the sex of its cardholder, and Ontario driver's licences will offer a non-binary option for sex in early 2017. The cardholder will be able to select an X instead of an M for male or an F for female.

The province said these changes will not affect the validity or function of the identification cards. It made the changes to include Canadians that identify as trans or non-binary in gender.

Hastings-Lennox MP Mike Bossio said the change is long overdue. He suggested it's time for Canadians to fight for what they believe in and rid the country of the divisiveness in its existing society.

"It's time to move forward into a more progressive, inclusive and accessible society," said Bossio. "Any step forward is a good step. It is time that we tear these barriers down. Whatever the barriers are, tear them all down. We started it with multiculturalism back in the early '80s, and it's now time to move to the next stage of that inclusiveness in our society."

In the wake of tragic hate crimes, like the recent mass shooting of a LGBT club in Orlando, Fla., that killed 49 people, however, officially identifying as trans or non-binary may be a scary prospect for many Canadians. Bossio suggested that the change in identification could pull the wedge from Canadian society that allows fear to percolate.

"I don't see this as a security risk," said Bossio. "As long as someone is out to get you, they are going to find a way to do it. The more inclusive we are, the more we can rely on everyday Canadians to help in circumventing any risks that happen from a security standpoint. A society based on fear and divisiveness creates the environment that generates that security risk in the first place." A public consultation is also set to be developing inclusive policy for how government ministries collect and use gender information on public government forms and products.

Countries including Australia, New Zealand and Nepal already use a non-binary gender identification option in government records when gender is not specified.

MPP for Prince Edward-Hastings Todd Smith suggested the change isn't one that will hit home with many people in the local community. He wasn't opposed to the change, but he said the government should be prioritizing other issues.

"We have the highest electricity rates in the country," said Smith, giving an example of one issue he wants made a priority. "I've been MPP for five years, and no one has ever come and said they would like to change the 'M' or 'F'. It shouldn't be a priority of the government but if the government feels it's important to do it, do it. It's just not an issue for most people."

Anyone who is interested in changing their sex on their driver's licence, or on official documents can sign up to receive notifications as consultations open at Ontario.ca/myID. Those looking to remove sex designation from their health cards can visit any ServiceOntario centre or by calling 1-866-532-3161. It's free of charge.