

APPELLATE DIVISION OF THE SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK, THIRD DEPARTMENT

Matter of Abigail X.

2026 NY Slip Op 01104 · No. CV-25-0089 · Decided February 26, 2026

SUMMARY

The Appellate Division, Third Department, held that a transgender petitioner was entitled to have the records of a name-change proceeding sealed under Civil Rights Law § 64-a. The court concluded that sealing depends on the potential harm from public access and that generalized public-interest concerns do not justify denying the request. The order was modified to grant the sealing application.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Appellate Division of the Supreme Court of the State of New York, Third Department
WRITING FOR THE COURT	McShan, J.; Garry, P.J.; Ceresia, J.; Fisher, J.; Mackey, J.
JURISDICTION	New York Appellate Division, Third Department
DECIDED	February 26, 2026
DOCKET	CV-25-0089
DISPOSITION	reversed_and_remanded
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Appeal from that part of an order of the Supreme Court, Saratoga County, denying petitioner's request to seal court records in a Civil Rights Law article 6 name-change proceeding.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Abuse of discretion; the Appellate Division reviewed whether Supreme Court applied the proper standard under Civil Rights Law § 64-a.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published
PARTIES	Abigail X.

TOPICS

- civil rights
- public records
- appellate procedure
- standard of review
- civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

- Civil rights
- New York name-change proceedings
- Court-record sealing
- Appellate procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Supreme Court abused its discretion by denying a transgender petitioner's request to seal the records of a Civil Rights Law article 6 name-change proceeding based on generalized or theoretical public-interest concerns.
2. Whether the petitioner's showing that public access could expose his transgender status and subject him to increased risk of harm required sealing under Civil Rights Law § 64-a.

HOLDINGS

1. A court may not deny a Civil Rights Law § 64-a sealing request based on real or theoretical public-interest concerns unrelated to the potential harm to the applicant arising from public access to the name-change proceeding's records.
2. A transgender petitioner who shows that public access to name-change records would expose his transgender status and increase his risk of hate crimes, harassment, or discrimination is entitled to have the records sealed under Civil Rights Law § 64-a.

KEY QUOTATIONS

*“whether to grant or deny a sealing request under Civil Rights Law § 64-a depends solely upon the potential for harm to the applicant arising from public access to a court record of the applicant's name change proceeding” (at *1)*

*“To decline to seal the record despite the applicant's showing of jeopardy is to place the applicant at risk of the very harms the statute is meant to guard against” (at *1)*

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Petitioner is transgender and sought to change his name to one reflecting his male gender identity and the name he uses in his personal and professional life. He stated that public access to the proceeding's records would expose his transgender status and increase his risk of hate crimes, harassment, and other discrimination. Supreme Court denied sealing based on a list of asserted public-interest concerns, including possible effects on creditors, property records, proceedings, background investigations, and future genealogical research.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Petitioner commenced a proceeding to change his name and seal the proceeding's court records. Supreme Court granted the name-change request but denied sealing, concluding that asserted public-interest concerns outweighed petitioner's safety concerns. Petitioner appealed, and the Appellate Division modified the order by reversing the denial of sealing and granting the application.

DISPOSITION

reversed_and_remanded

REMAND INSTRUCTIONS

The order was modified by reversing the portion denying petitioner's request to seal the court records and granting the sealing application; the order was otherwise affirmed. No costs were awarded.

CASES CITED

- Matter of Timothy C., 242 AD3d 1483 [3d Dept 2025]
- Matter of Cody VV. [Brandi VV.], 226 AD3d 24 [3d Dept 2024]
- Matter of Kieran B., 242 AD3d 1486 [3d Dept 2025]
- Matter of Christopher C., 242 AD3d 1485 [3d Dept 2025]

OPINION

Matter of Abigail X. 2026 NY Slip Op 01104

PER CURIAM.

Matter of Abigail X. (2026 NY Slip Op 01104) Matter of Abigail X. 2026 NY Slip Op 01104 Decided on February 26, 2026 Appellate Division, Third Department Published by New York State Law Reporting Bureau pursuant to Judiciary Law § 431. This opinion is uncorrected and subject to revision before publication in the Official Reports. Decided and Entered:February 26, 2026 CV-25-0089 [*1]In the Matter of Abigail X., Appellant. Calendar Date:January 8, 2026 Before:Garry, P.J., Ceresia, Fisher, McShan and Mackey, JJ. Empire Justice Center, Albany (M. Lettie Dickerson of counsel), for appellant. Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP, New York City (Evan M. Gilbert of counsel), for New York City Anti-Violence Project and another, amici curiae. McShan, J. Appeal from that part of an order of the Supreme Court (James Walsh, J.), entered December 6, 2024 in Saratoga County, which, in a proceeding pursuant to Civil Rights Law § 60, denied petitioner's request to seal court records. Petitioner is a transgender individual who commenced this Civil Rights Law article 6 proceeding to change his name and to seal the court record of this proceeding. Supreme Court granted the name change but denied his sealing request, finding that a list of "public interest concerns" outweighed petitioner's safety concerns. [FN1] Asserting that the court abused its discretion in denying his sealing request, petitioner appeals. We are once again confronted with the denial of a sealing request in a Civil Rights Law article 6 proceeding — by the same Supreme Court justice — predicated on amorphous "public interest concerns." As was the case in those appeals, we once again modify the order to grant petitioner's sealing request. As we recently indicated, "nothing in the statute conditions sealing the record of the name change proceeding upon an applicant's financial circumstances or the status of unrelated civil litigation" (Matter of Timothy C. , 242 AD3d 1483 , 1484 [3d Dept 2025]). Rather, "whether to grant or deny a sealing request under Civil Rights Law § 64-a depends solely upon the potential for harm to the applicant arising from public access to a court record of the applicant's name change proceeding" and "a court abuses its discretion by relying upon real or theoretical 'public interest concerns' to deny a Civil Rights Law § 64-a sealing request" (id. ; see Civil Rights Law § 64-a [1]; Matter of Cody VV. [Brandi VV.] , 226 AD3d 24 , 27-29 [3d Dept 2024]). Said directly, "[t]o decline to seal the record despite the applicant's showing of jeopardy is to place the applicant

at risk of the very harms the statute is meant to guard against" (Matter of Kieran B. , 242 AD3d 1486 , 1487 [3d Dept 2025]). Petitioner in this case affirmed his transgender status and indicated that he was seeking to change his name to one that reflects his male gender identity in conformance with the name he uses in his personal and professional life. Petitioner also expressed fear that exposure to the records from this proceeding would effectively expose his transgender status and expose him to increased risk for hate crimes, harassment and other discrimination. Those circumstances warrant entitlement to have the record of his name change proceeding sealed pursuant to Civil Rights Law § 64-a (see Matter of Kieran B. , 242 AD3d at 1488; Matter of Christopher C. , 242 AD3d 1485 , 1485-1486 [3d Dept 2025]; Matter of Timothy C. , 242 AD3d at 1485) and "Supreme Court abused its discretion here when it again invoked an inapplicable standard to arrive at the opposite conclusion" (Matter of Kieran B. , 242 AD3d at 1488). Garry, P.J., Ceresia, Fisher and Mackey, JJ., concur. ORDERED that the order is modified, on the law, without costs, by reversing so much thereof [*2]as denied petitioner's request to seal court records; application granted to that extent; and, as so modified, affirmed. Footnotes Footnote 1: That list "includ[ed], but [was] not limited to, the due process of any judgment creditors, the effects upon powers of attorney, any unknown implications with Article 81 proceedings, the due process in foreclosure actions, deed recordation and title insurance, mortgages recorded with the County Clerk's office, probate matters, interference with single scope background investigations for security clearance purposes or firearm authorizations, and lastly, any adverse impact upon future genealogical research." Supreme Court further cited the potential for prejudice to a litigant in a future proceeding that was merely theoretical at the time of this proceeding.