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Keeping Your Legal Documents Consistent

A practical guide to aligning your records after a name change

Agard Research Associates Inc.

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Why bother? It helps with far more than voting

Nothing here is required to vote in New Jersey under current law. Consistent records are simply good practice, whatever happens in Washington:

01 **Travel** REAL ID is now enforced for domestic flights. Airlines expect your documents to match.

02 **Passports** Applications and renewals go faster when your name chain is complete.

03 **Money and benefits** Social Security, banking, and payroll systems flag mismatched names.

04 **Peace of mind** If a documentation rule ever takes effect, aligned records mean the fewest hurdles.

The goal: an unbroken name chain

Your birth certificate always shows your birth name. It is never updated for marriage or divorce. The goal is a certified document for every link between that name and the name you use today.

01	**Birth name** Certified birth certificate
02	**Marriage** Certified marriage or civil union certificate
03	**Divorce or court order** Divorce judgment or name-change order
04	**Current legal name** Every record matches, letter for letter

Order certified copies, not photocopies. Agencies rarely accept photocopies for identity purposes.

Build your certified document inventory

01 **Certified birth certificate** N.J. births: Office of Vital Statistics and Registry, or your town's local registrar. Born elsewhere: that state's vital records office (the CDC keeps a directory).

02 **Marriage or civil union certificate** From the vital records office where the marriage took place. Replaceable if lost, but allow lead time.

03 **Divorce judgment** Especially one restoring a prior name. Certified copies come from the Superior Court in the county of the divorce.

04 **Court name-change order** For changes outside marriage. In N.J., adults petition the Superior Court; marriage itself needs no court order.

05 **Naturalization or citizenship certificate** Replacements use USCIS Form N-565. Fees run several hundred dollars and processing takes months, so locate the original now.

06 **Consular Report of Birth Abroad** For citizens born overseas to U.S. citizen parents. Replaceable through the Department of State.

The passport: one document that does it all

A valid U.S. passport proves citizenship in your current legal name.

It resolves the name-mismatch problems that birth-record paths create. About half of Americans do not have one.

How to get or update one

- First passport: Form DS-11, filed in person
- Most renewals: Form DS-82, by mail
- Name change within one year of issue: Form DS-5504, free
- Passport card: a lower-cost option that also shows citizenship (not valid for international flights)

Routine processing takes several weeks. Do not wait for a deadline.

After a name change, update agencies in order

Each agency’s record feeds the next, so the sequence matters:

01 **Social Security** Form SS-5 with certified proof of the change. Free. An unmatched Social Security name causes payroll and benefits flags on its own.

02 **N.J. Motor Vehicle Commission** Update your license or state ID under the 6 Point ID program. Note: a N.J. REAL ID does not show citizenship.

03 **Voter registration** File an updated form, the same one used for new registrations, at least 21 days before each election. It is free. If you miss the deadline, vote in person and sign both your old and new names.

Keep your name identical letter for letter everywhere, including middle names and suffixes. Data systems treat small differences as mismatches.

Free help is available

VoteRiders

voteriders.org

Nonpartisan nonprofit. Free help getting IDs and the underlying documents, and often pays the fees.

Legal Services of N.J.

lsnj.org

Free civil legal help, including name changes and vital records, for residents who qualify by income.

Vital records offices

nj.gov/health/vital

N.J. Office of Vital Statistics for state records. The CDC directory lists every other state's office.

For advice about your individual situation, consult a licensed New Jersey attorney.

Good records today. Fewer headaches tomorrow.

Certified copies | One matching name everywhere | A passport if you can

Agard Research Associates Inc. is a nonpartisan, nonprofit research institute in New Jersey.

Nothing in this presentation is required to register or vote in New Jersey under current law. It provides general information about public processes, not legal advice. Procedures and fees change; verify details with the issuing agency. Version 1.2, November 2026.

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