

CREDIT REPORT CHALLENGES FOR TRANS CONSUMERS

CASE STUDY

In March 2021, Billie Simmons, a trans woman, [shared her story](#) with the Center for LGBTQ Economic Advancement & Research. Her personal experience illustrates some ways that credit bureaus fail to serve trans and gender-nonconforming consumers who change their full names.

Fragmented Credit Reports

After changing her full name, Simmons shares she has been unable to get a credit report or score with all of her credit history: “Personally, I have experienced [my credit] splitting in two. So you have your credit score in your deadname and your credit score in your chosen name.” Even years later, she has been unable to update her reports to include all of her credit history. “A couple of months ago, I did a full audit of my own credit,” says Simmons. “I listed down all the different accounts I have, all the different balances I have, and went through and tried basically every credit reporting software out there—and none of them could get my actual credit history correct. Actually, none of them.” Simmons places the blame for the inaccuracy of her report squarely upon credit bureaus, adding, “[T]hat is just a failure of service, to be honest. Because no one is actually able to see my credit score as it is.”

“I listed down all the different accounts I have, all the different balances I have, and went through and tried basically every credit reporting software out there—and none of them could get my actual credit history correct. Actually, none of them.”

Opaque Processes

Although trans and gender-nonconforming people may attempt to update the name on their report directly with the credit bureaus, Simmons observes that “Very often they will come back with ‘Well you need to update your credit cards in those names first.’” She says that the inability to update the name on a credit report directly and inability to update the names on prior accounts with old creditors means that “oftentimes you cannot get new lines of credit or update your credit cards, and then you are forced to live with an outdated credit report.”

Discrimination

“To me, there is a very straight line drawn between having your deadnames on your credit reports and employment and housing discrimination,” says Simmons. “My deadname is very obviously not a traditional woman’s name, and so if someone who is vetting me to rent an apartment or hire me sees that on my report, that is outing me,” Simmons elaborates.

“To me there is a very straight line drawn between having your deadnames on your credit reports and employment and housing discrimination.”

Hearts & Minds

In addition to credit damage and discrimination Simmons observes that psychological harms also result from trans & gender-nonconforming consumers’ inability to update credit reports with their full names. “[I]t is really unpleasant to be consistently deadnamed by credit products, by accounts, emails, and letters. Receiving a letter to your home addressed to your deadname is an incredibly traumatic experience... [a]nd it seems like this is an issue that is not really being taken seriously by a lot of bureaus.”

Solutions

In considering solutions that credit bureaus could implement to rectify issues for trans and gender-nonconforming people, Simmons says, “The main thing is: Make it easy to update your name on these reports. Do not require it to be based on existing credit products or new credit products.” To adequately serve trans and gender-nonconforming consumers, she says, “we need products based on our unique needs.” Concerning the ways credit bureaus could protect trans and nonbinary customers from discrimination in reporting previous names, Simmons recommends, “Personally, I would advocate for in this specific case expunging previous names from those credit reports, at least when they are pulled for consumer things. You know, employers do not need to know it, landlords do not need to know this, and it only does more harm than good.”