

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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transcend legal

## **Houston County Facing Potential Lawsuit Over Transgender Health Carve-Out in Employee Health Plan**

*On Tuesday evening, a County employee and her attorney will speak out against Houston County's denial of life-saving, transgender-related health care to county employees and their families.*

**WARNER ROBINS, GA** — In an effort to avoid a lawsuit, Anna Lange, a transgender sergeant in the Houston County Sheriff's Office, is speaking out against the exclusion of life-saving, transgender-related health care in the Houston County, Georgia, employee health plan. The health plan covers most doctor-recommended care but contains a carve-out for health care treatments that are for the purpose of treating gender dysphoria.

Federal nondiscrimination law prohibits the exclusion of transgender-related care, and a jury in Wisconsin granted two employees of that state a combined \$780,000 after they successfully challenged a state employee health plan that contained a carve-out similar to the one found in the Houston County plan. Just prior to the court ruling, the Wisconsin state plan voted to voluntarily remove the exclusion. If the Houston County plan does not vote to remove the exclusion, it risks a lawsuit.

Anna Lange and Noah Lewis, an attorney with Transcend Legal, will offer public comments to the Houston County Board of Commissioners at their Board meeting:

**Date:** Tuesday, February 19, 2019  
**Time:** 5:00 p.m. available for interviews; Meeting begins at 6:00 p.m. E.T.  
**Where:** Houston County Board of Commissioners  
200 Carl Vinson Parkway, Warner Robins, Georgia 31088

Sgt. Lange began her career with Sheriff's Office in September 2006, and she came out as female and transitioned on the job in 2017. She was initially told that her treatments for gender dysphoria would be covered, so in November 2018, she had a consultation with a surgeon. But she then received a letter saying preauthorization for surgery was denied due to a specific insurance carve-out. She missed her January 31, 2019, surgery date.

"The Sheriff's Office has treated me with respect and values my 12 years of service," said **Anna Lange**. "But the County singles out and excludes the doctor-recommended care that I need simply because I'm transgender. That sends a clear message that my service as a public safety officer is not wanted or valued in Houston County."

Transcend Legal wrote to the Board and **County Attorney Tom Hall** (tel. 478-542-2012) on January 16, 2019, requesting that the exclusion be removed. The County continues to decline to meet or discuss the matter and has not yet issued a reply to the letter.

Transcend Legal also wrote on February 6, 2019, to Anthem Blue Cross Blue Shield, which administers the plan. Anthem provides “administrative services only” to the Plan, which includes providing a template plan to the County that contained the transgender care exclusion. Anthem—which covers this care for its own employees—recognizes transgender-related care as medically necessary and would cover it but for the carve-out. The County chose to adopt the carve-out, but it also has the power to change the terms of the Plan and remove it.

Transgender-related care is recognized as medically necessary by insurance companies and is covered under the federal employee health benefits plan, Medicare, and is widely covered by private employers. The American Medical Association, the American Psychological Association, the American Psychiatric Association, and many other national healthcare organizations support insurance coverage for such treatments. Even the IRS recognizes it as medically necessary, tax-deductible care.

“We are hopeful that this can be resolved without a lawsuit,” said **Noah Lewis, Executive Director of Transcend Legal**. “When we inform private employers that it is unlawful to exclude transgender-related care, they almost always voluntarily remove the exclusion. The Board has the opportunity to treat all of its employees equally and vote to end this unfair treatment of county employees and their families,” he continued.

In a separate case, Transcend Legal is representing Skyler Jay, a University of Georgia employee and “Queer Eye” guest, in his lawsuit challenging the exclusion of transgender-related health care from the University System of Georgia employee health plan, which is also administered by Anthem.

*Transcend Legal is a national nonprofit dedicated to ensuring health care equality for transgender people.  
For more information, please visit [transcendlegal.org](https://transcendlegal.org).*

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