

Finding Our Names in the Law

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This article is about how a small community project changed that. It began as an effort to create a support group for trans and nonbinary law students and eventually grew into a learning and advocacy space focused on legal gender recognition. The project took place in Harong, Quezon City. Harong translates to “home,” a fitting place for a gathering that sought to create safety, belonging, and affirmation. What started as a grant requirement became a moment of connection and collective learning that reshaped how I see myself, my community, and my place in the law.

The project began quietly. After attending a fellowship workshop, I knew I wanted to build something meaningful, but I also knew my limits. Law school was about to start, and my time would be restricted. Still, I prepared early. I reached out to people I trusted, contacted advocates working on the Simplified Legal Gender Recognition Bill, and asked for support where I needed it. I hired project support to help with creative and logistical tasks and formed a small volunteer team among my peers. For the first time, I was not carrying advocacy work alone.

The heart of the project was a face-to-face learning session called “May Pangalan, May Karapatan” or “With a Name, With a Right,” held in Harong, Quezon City. The session focused on understanding the Legal Gender Recognition Bill and why it matters to everyday life. More importantly, it created a space where trans and nonbinary people, alongside legal allies, could speak openly about harm. We talked about deadnaming, misgendering, and how the absence of legal recognition allows discrimination to continue quietly in schools, workplaces, and public services.

Participants learned together. Some arrived thinking legal gender recognition was simply about correcting documents. They left understanding that it is about safety, dignity, and survival. Others gained clarity on the difference between the Simplified Legal Gender Recognition Bill and the SOGIE Equality Bill, which stands for Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics Equality Bill. We discussed how the SOGIE Equality Bill focuses on preventing and penalizing discrimination, while the Legal Gender Recognition Bill affirms identity through documentation, and why both are necessary to protect trans communities.

There were moments of frustration as participants identified legal gaps and loopholes, but there was also relief in naming these issues collectively. One participant traveled from Bacolod to attend

and shared their experience as a nonbinary pre-law student and drag performer. Their presence reminded us that our community is diverse, regional, and shaped by different realities, yet connected by the same need for recognition and safety.

For me, the most personal moment came when I met another trans masculine person who is also in law school. When I first entered law school, I did not know anyone like me. That isolation shaped how small I made myself. Meeting someone who shared that experience felt like proof that community is possible. After the session, trans masculine and nonbinary people approached me to ask how to enter law school. They shared that the event made them believe it was possible to pursue legal education as a trans person. I told them honestly that it is hard, but that we can still do it, especially when we do not do it alone.

The connections did not end with the event. We created an online space called Trans and Nonbinary Law Philippines, which we are now working to formalize as an organization for trans and nonbinary law students and lawyers. This space aims to provide mentorship, peer support, and collective advocacy within the legal field. I was also invited to join the Pioneer Filipino Transgender Men Movement (PFTM) and became part of their community. Attending their Transgender Day of Remembrance event, which included a self-defense session, psychological safety discussions, and candle lighting where we spoke the names of transgender people who have been killed, grounded my advocacy in remembrance, care, and accountability. It reminded me why policy work matters and why names must be honored.

This project taught me that leadership is not about having all the answers. It is about listening, creating space, and trusting that collective learning can lead to change. I learned that my experiences as a trans masculine person in law are not something to hide, but something that can help shape safer paths for others.

If there is one thing I hope readers take from this, it is that small, community-led projects can carry deep impact when they are rooted in care and belonging. We may not yet have all the laws we need, but every space where trans and nonbinary people are affirmed, heard, and supported already moves us closer to justice.

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