

HB 1147 Places of Public Accommodation and Public Buildings - Single-Occupancy Public Restrooms – Availability the Accessible to All Act
SUPPORT
House Economic Matters Committee
March 3, 2020

Good Afternoon Chairman Davis and Members of the House Economic Matters Committee. I am Tammy Bresnahan, Director of Advocacy for AARP MD. As you know, AARP Maryland is one of the largest membership-based organizations in the Free State, encompassing almost 900,000 members. AARP MD supports **HB 1147 Places of Public Accommodation and Public Buildings-Single Occupancy Public Restrooms-Availability the Accessible to All Act**.

HB 1147 requires single-occupancy public restrooms in public buildings and places of public accommodation to be marked with gender-inclusive signage that does not use pictorial representations and contains only descriptive language, such as “restroom” or “bathroom.” Local governments are responsible for enforcing the bill with respect to places of public accommodation, and they are authorized to set civil fines for violations of the bill’s requirements.

A universal washroom provides people of all abilities with dignity and privacy. This includes people with mobility devices, people who require personal support workers or a service dog, people who have experienced trauma in washrooms, and many other scenarios.

According to the New York Times public restrooms didn’t become commonplace in this country until the late 19th century. A cholera epidemic during the Civil War made people realize that it was inappropriate to throw the contents of a chamber pot out the window, and generated a deep commitment to public hygiene. Ever since their introduction, restrooms have been a curious ground zero for civil rights, whether for African-Americans, people with disabilities and or others.

The public humiliation and confusion often involved makes it especially hard to confront restroom discrimination and educate the general public. But the same basic principle holds true for people who have confronted this issue before: Everyone deserves to be treated with respect and dignity, including while involved in such basic human activities as using a public restroom. Therefore it is our belief that we should do everything in our power to lessen the confusion. HB 1147 does just that!

For these reasons we support HB 1147. We ask the Committee for a FAVORABLE report.