



Wednesday, February 26, 2020

Written Testimony Favorable to HB1147: Places of Public Accommodation and Public Buildings - Single-Occupancy Public Restrooms - Availability (The Accessible to All Act)

Delegate Davis, Chair, Delegate Dumais, Vice-Chair, and esteemed members of the Economic Matters Committee:

My name is Elizabeth Graham. I write to you today on behalf of the leadership team of Maryland Trans*Unity. We are pleased to have been given the opportunity to review SB0401, also known as The Accessible to All Act. This legislation would require that certain single-occupancy restrooms be made available to persons of any gender identity and that any associated signage be gender-inclusive. **Maryland Trans*Unity fully supports SB0401 and we ask you for a favorable report so that the bill can be passed along to the Senate floor for consideration.**

Maryland Trans*Unity is a peer-led volunteer run support group for people who are transgender or gender non-conforming. We have meetings in Bethesda and Hyattsville on a bi-monthly and monthly basis. As a leader and facilitator of this support group, my colleagues have asked me to highlight the challenges transgender or gender non-conforming (TGNC) people experience in everyday life when accessing and navigating public bathrooms. Multi-occupancy public bathrooms are especially stressful - it seems that cisgender people think we are in the wrong one regardless of which one we use.

Single occupancy public bathrooms, when available, are a huge relief to transgender, gender non-conforming and gender expansive adults and children - even when the signage is gendered. At least the door can be closed and locked for privacy.

However, the mere existence of single occupancy bathrooms is not enough to make using a public restroom feel safe for transgender, non-binary, and gender-diverse people. Only signage which makes it clear that a single occupancy bathroom is gender inclusive - or available to anyone - will do that.

We are still stopped when trying to access a restroom that is vacant when the one that correlates with our perceived gender is occupied. This very thing happened to another support group leader a few weeks ago at a restaurant in Rockville, Maryland. My colleague was using a

cane due to a leg injury, and was redirected away from a single occupancy restroom designated for “women” to the “men’s” single occupancy restroom on the other side of the restaurant – only to find that the men’s restroom was occupied.

Our support group members are more than trans, non-binary, or gender nonconforming. For an autistic person like myself, public bathrooms with multiple stalls can be overwhelming due to excessive or unexpected stimuli. Our participants with mobility challenges may take longer to get to a bathroom when it is desperately needed. Other participants may need a Direct Support Professional to accompany them into the community and into a public restroom. This, too, requires privacy and perceived gender of the Direct Support Professional may not match those of the disabled person.

We also have parents of children that attend our support group. Some of those parents present as a different gender than their own. Sometimes a single occupancy bathroom is needed so the young child and their parents feel safe because they are together. And sometimes, parents just need access to the bathroom with a functioning changing table.

Under the 2014 Fairness for All Marylanders Act (FAMA), Maryland greatly expanded protections for transgender individuals which included the use of locker rooms and other public accommodations. **In keeping with the intent of FAMA, SB0401: Places of Public Accommodation and Public Buildings - Single-Occupancy Public Restrooms - Availability (The Accessible to All Act)** seeks to reduce the stigma and violence experienced by the transgender community in public restrooms.

The National Center for Transgender Equality’s *2015 US Trans Survey* reports that more than half (59%) of respondents avoided using a restroom in the year prior to the survey due to fear of verbal, physical, sexual assault and/or other problems, like being asked to leave the restroom or overall location. Nearly one third (32%) of respondents in the previous year reported avoiding eating or drinking in a public location in order to avoid having to use the restroom. 8% of respondents reported having a urinary tract infection, kidney infection, or another kidney problem in the last year from avoiding restrooms.

Out of consideration for the mental and physical health, as well as the equitable treatment of transgender individuals, **Maryland Trans*Unity urges you to vote in favor HB1147 (The Accessible to All Act)** - so that all of Maryland’s residents and visitors are able to remain active and fully participate in the community.

Sincerely

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