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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

HB 1147 Testimony – Accessible to All Act

Good afternoon Chairman Davis, Vice Chair Dumais, Esteemed Colleagues,

Thank you for the opportunity to present today on my legislation – the Accessible to All Act.

A single occupancy bathroom is one that is fully enclosed, contains only one toilet, and has a door that locks. We’ve likely all used one - whether it’s on an airplane, in our committee rooms, or in our own homes. Many single occupancy bathrooms are already unisex or gender neutral.

All people deserve privacy and peace of mind when using a public bathroom. Gender neutral bathrooms provide a safe and welcoming space for all individuals in our community including those with disabilities and caregivers, nursing mothers, seniors, and parents of young children. Bathrooms that are accessible to all allow caregivers easy access to those they support, including senior citizens and individuals with disabilities, protect all of our community members from harassment, and allow parents the freedom to nurse and care for the toileting needs of their small children.

Genders-specific bathrooms create unnecessary challenges:

- Senior citizens, Alzheimer patients and the disabled often have personal attendants of a different gender and need bathrooms that are accessible and accommodating.
- Many child care programs take field trips to enhance the educational experience of their young learners. Bathroom usage is difficult as most programs have mixed-gender groups of children, but nearly all providers are female. Young boys are reluctant and apprehensive about using the “Women’s Room” but to ensure proper supervision are forced to do so.
- Fathers should not have to change diapers on the floor and most likely would not be comfortable using a restroom labeled as “women.”
- Parents and guardians with children of a different gender often encounter scrutiny when accessing gender-specific restrooms.

Last week the City Council of Salisbury passed (on First Reader) an ordinance that will remove gender identification signs from single-occupancy bathrooms. It is expected to become law soon. Last summer, Baltimore City became the first jurisdiction in the state to require this change.

Illinois and California, along with cities like Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, Austin, and New York, have all passed laws that require single occupancy restrooms to be available to all - regardless of gender.

HB1147 would require all public single-occupancy restrooms to have gender-inclusive signage. New signs are available for purchase online for as little as \$15.

I am also offering an amendment that would clarify the definition of “Gender-Inclusive Signage” to allow gender-inclusive pictures as well as words, such as “restroom” and a icon of a toilet to accommodate the needs of the disability community. Businesses who have already made the effort to post gender-inclusive signs may continue to use those signs. The amendment also ensures establishments have an appropriate amount of time to update their signs.

This bill is supported by businesses, the disability community, and the senior community across Maryland. Three restaurants are joining us today to testify in support, while other businesses have submitted letters of support. Since late last year, we’ve worked closely with the Maryland Retailers Association as well as the Restaurant Association of Maryland to ensure this legislation was satisfactory. Neither organization has any opposition to the bill.

With this simple and minor fix, we can make our community accessible to all Maryland. Including our sponsor amendment, I would ask for a favorable report on HB 1147.