

HB10- Public Facilities- Changing Facilities

Position: Support

Hello, my name is Steve Auerbach and I am the proud father of a young man named Alex.

Alex was born with cerebral palsy and is diagnosed with spastic quadraplegia. He has little to no use of his arms or legs. He requires assistance with all levels of daily care from eating, bathing, positioning and toileting. He has trouble communicating but still likes to have things his way.

But he loves swimming, music, french fries and pizza. He also loves to get out and go places, which we try to do every single day. It doesn't seem to matter much to him where we go, the grocery store can be as interesting as the mall or a movie, but getting out puts him in a better mood and even seems to help him sleep better at night.

Although the place doesn't matter much to him, it does to me. I have tasks and errands to accomplish which he goes along with fine, but I have to plan his trip so that we can complete it without need to utilize a restroom. That means that I have to balance everything that needs to happen, travel time, and everything else that might go on in our trip. I discuss it with him and tell him how long it will be until we get back home. Alex does not have a good concept of time, but I keep him informed while we are out how long I expect it to be before we get back.

The problems that I am trying to avoid are two-fold. First is an issue that we are not really here to discuss today and that is the design of many bathrooms, even ADA compliant ones, does not allow me to position his chair in a position that will allow me to safely transfer him to a toilet, where I need to remain to hold him upright for the entire time he may need. An important issue, but for another day.

The second, is that, in the event of him having an accident, I literally have no options for safely cleaning him and changing his clothes unless others are with us to help. He is unable to stand independently to help,

so that leaves only a choice between leaving him wet or soiled and trying to transport him home as quickly as possible or, utilizing everything I have in his backpack to try and keep him safe while I try to clean him on the floor of our wheelchair van or the floor of a public restroom.

Both are choices that you would not want to pick from, but they are thoughts that follow me around on every trip that I take with my son.

I know that the same issues confront him and his caregivers in his day program, The Arc of Howard County, every single time they try and arrange an activity outside of the building.

Alex and I have been fortunate, it has been a long time since we have had to make this choice. Maybe I'm an excellent planner, maybe I'm exceedingly lucky, although lottery results tell another story, but widespread availability of large accessible restrooms and adult changing tables, if needed, would allow Alex and I a little more peace of mind in our travels.

Thank you for your time and attention to our story.

Sincerely,
Steve Auerbach