

House Health and Government Operations Committee
HB10: Public Buildings Changing Facilities for Adult Diapers
January 29, 2020
Position: Support

Imagine getting ready for work and suddenly you get an emergency alert on your cell phone informing you that all of the restrooms at your place of employment are out of order and can't be used that day. Would you go to work?

Imagine wanting to plan a vacation with your spouse and children to travel from the Eastern Shore to Rocky Gap State Park only to learn that all rest stops and restrooms have been condemned and aren't available for use for an undetermined amount of time? Would you make the trip?

Ladies, imagine planning an evening out on the town with your friends. You're planning dinner at your favorite restaurant, see a movie and then maybe get dessert, but you guessed it, restroom have not been invented and don't exist for your use. Do you go? You don't, because everybody has to go (pun intended). Restrooms aren't a luxury but provide a necessary function for all human beings to live their lives.

Most people won't encounter these scenarios but my daughter, Maggie, who has multiple disabilities, and our family confronts it on a daily basis. And we aren't the only ones. There are thousands of Marylanders, young and old, with developmental disabilities, acquired disabilities through accident, aging and war that require an adult size changing table to address their toileting needs.

Adult size changing tables do not exist in state and public or private buildings where people gather to learn, work, worship, socialize, and recreate. As a result people with this need often don't; receive their education in integrated settings; work with their peers in competitive employment; worship; socialize and recreate where everyone else does because there is no restroom to meet there needs.

Maggie is 27 years-old. She has cerebral palsy. As a result she is non-ambulatory and non-verbal but does communicate with signs, gestures, vocalizations and assistive technology. Maggie is smart and cares about her life but is limited with where she can go and what she can do because of the non-existence of restrooms to meet her needs.

My mother and father in-law had their 50th wedding anniversary about 10 years ago. To celebrate they rented a beach house at Virginia Beach where we all could stay. They found a beautiful home, completely accessible with an elevator to accommodate Maggie's wheelchair. While we were grateful, the wheelchair and the accessibility of the beach house weren't the only issues. Our travel to and from was a hurdle then and still is today.

The time to travel form our home to Virginia Beach is about 6 hours. My daughter needs to be changed every 2- 3 hours. If we don't change her in a timely manner she risks developing a

urinary tract infection. Where would we change her? Maryland has rest stops that my husband and I could use but nothing for my daughter. The accessible restrooms are large but don't include an adult size changing table. Many suggested placing my 5'4," 96lb daughter on the restroom floor and changing her there as a solution. Would you lie on the floor of a public restroom, even if on a blanket? Even if we were willing, what about the mechanics of lifting her on and off the floor? It isn't safe for her or for us. To do this is to literally invite an accident to happen. Who knew going to the bathroom could be so treacherous?

In the end we decided to make the trip. We needed to be with our family as much as Maggie did. We'd miss all previous vacations we didn't want to miss this one too. So off we went...

When Maggie told us that she needed to be changed our solution was to park in an isolated corner of the state rest stop parking lot. Once parked we did our reconnaissance and made sure that no one was around. We then proceeded to remove Maggie from the car and took her out of her wheelchair. We then placed her in the front passenger seat of our van and reclined the seat as far as it would go. The bad news is it doesn't recline to a flat position but we'd have to do our best. To provide her with some semblance of privacy, we hung towels on all the windows and while standing outside of the van, with the front passenger door open providing access to Maggie we rolled her, which isn't easy or comfortable for her because she has two titanium rods in her back, and changed her while concerned about her comfort, and whether or not someone would just appear and catch us, as if we were doing something wrong.

I argue that the non-existence of changing tables to accommodate the toileting needs of people who require them is in violation of their civil rights in that the non-existence denies people access to work, play, and love, learn and pursue their aspirations in the community as described above.

This reality reminds me of Ms. Katharine Johnson, an African-American mathematician, employed at NASA's Langley Research Center, in 1961 to calculate flight trajectories for Project Mercury and other missions. Ms. Johnson literally ran ½ mile to and from the building in which worked to the segregated restroom available for her use only to be reprimanded for her absence.

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Respectfully submitted.