

“Requiring, except under certain circumstances, that a diaper-changing facility suitable for changing the diaper of an adult be installed in public buildings, in certain public restrooms, or in a public restroom which undergoes substantial renovation after October 1, 2020; requiring certain entities to report to the Department of General Services the location of a suitable diaper-changing facility; requiring the Department to maintain a list of the locations of diaper-changing facilities on its website; etc.”

Testimony for SB44

Greetings and thank you for taking the time read this testimony for SB44.

My name is JoEllen Barnhart. I live in Washington County, Maryland. I am a 60-year-old single mother of three adult sons. Two of my sons have developmental disabilities. It is my son, Adam, who would benefit from the passage of SB44. Adam is a 24-year old man and has a form of muscular dystrophy and autism that has advanced to a palliative-hospice care stage that requires the use of a reclining wheelchair. He suffers the pain of a collapsing spine and weakening lungs. He does not walk or stand. Adam is the beneficiary self-directed support care professionals thanks to the Community Pathways Waiver offered through the Developmental Disabilities Administration. In addition, a superior palliative and hospice team oversees his medical complications. Despite his dramatic challenges, Adam seeks to live each day as fully-engaged as his body will tolerate.

He enjoys going to restaurants, museums, and parks. His favorite activities are “Challenge” bowling and watching athletic games on the campuses of high schools, colleges and universities. And, as you might expect, he is a huge fan of the Orioles and the color of his wheelchair reflects it. But...due to Adam’s age (24 years) and his deteriorating physical condition, it is difficult to keep Adam engaged in the activities he loves.

One of the major obstacles preventing Adam from being out of the house and engaged in his community involves the lack of appropriate restroom facilities. Since, Adam’s professional support-care team is comprised of females, we are left with a scenario that involves looking for a restroom large enough to accommodate a wheelchair, its occupant and support care-provider. More often than not, we find ourselves clearing a female-dedicated restroom for his use to avoid embarrassment. Most of the time, we are forced to choose another option – limit the time away from home to avoid restrooms all together. Adam will soon require a changing station in a restroom. Where are they? We already struggle to find a public restroom situation that accommodates our needs. With a changing table need looming in front of us, I see an end to leaving our house. How will my son live any meaningful form of an inclusive life with dignity?

Thank you, in advance, for your consideration this important and basic human dignity law and for your support to SB44.

JoEllen M. Barnhart, Ph.D.