

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
Date: February 12, 2020
Bill: SB 401, The Accessible to All Act
Position: Support

Testimony by Julie Salz Greenstein

Chairman Smith and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 401, a bill that that would require any single-occupancy public restroom to be designated as gender-neutral. I'd also like to thank Senator Kagan for introducing this bill and Senator Lee, my representative, for supporting this bill.

My name is Julie Greenstein and I live with my family in Bethesda.

I was at a restaurant this past weekend and I went to use the bathroom. There was a single men's room and a single women's room. The women's room was occupied, as it so often is, and the men's room was vacant. I stood there for a few minutes waiting for the women's bathroom to become available. It didn't. So I decided to go into the men's room. The men's room and the women's room are identical. The only difference is the sign on the door. This is ridiculous.

For me and other women, waiting a bit longer for a bathroom is just an inconvenience. But for so many others, like for my own kids, those signs on the door mean much more.

My husband and I have 16-year-old twins that attend Walter Johnson High School. When my twins were born, they were what we say "assigned female at birth" or AFAB. Several years ago, one of my twins came out as transgender and more recently, my other child now identifies as non-binary.

When they were first born, I remember getting a lot of advice about raising children and hearing about all the different issues I may face as a parent. The possibility of having kids that are transgender or non-binary was never discussed, not even on the radar. At that point, I didn't even know the terms transgender and non-binary.

When they did come out to my husband and me, we immediately embraced them and told them both we would love them no matter what.

And to this day I'm so glad we did. I'm on several Facebook groups for parents of transgender and non-conforming kids. Every day, on these pages, I read stories from parents expressing their wish for their spouse or other family members to support their child. They talk about how this lack of support shatters their kids, leads to depression and in some cases suicide.

We are so fortunate that our entire family and friend circle has embraced our kids with love and support. It means everything to my husband and me and it means everything to my two kids.

This love and support from family, friends and community is what makes my kids able to lead happy and fulfilled lives – and I’m talking about two teenagers here! My son does theatre and is on his high school’s wrestling team. My other child taught themselves guitar, loves history and is one of the funniest people I know.

Before my son came out as transgender, before he even knew that there was such a word, he felt uncomfortable using the women’s/girls bathroom in public establishments and at school.

At age 10, he got his hair cut so he could look like a boy; his true self, but then girls and women in the bathroom started wondering what he was doing there. It wasn’t until he came out as transgender in 7th grade and started using the mens’ bathroom, that he felt comfortable and in the right place.

My other twin, who identifies as non-binary, won’t use the bathroom in public places unless the bathrooms are designated as gender neutral. And now we try to go only to restaurants that have a gender-neutral restroom option.

Teens today already put so much pressure on themselves and are ridden with anxiety. This is especially true for non-conforming kids, who every day worry about being bullied, or how they can get out of gym class to avoid changing in front of their peers. Do we really want these kids also worrying about where they will go to the bathroom or how they will hold it in so they don’t have to use a bathroom?

Providing access to gender-neutral bathrooms can alleviate some of this anxiety. Not only for the LGBTQ community but also for parents accompanying their young children and caregivers assisting people for whom they are responsible for in the bathroom, regardless of gender.

I’ve asked restaurant managers to make the change to their single occupancy restrooms and they were happy to do so. They understand that their customers prefer the gender-neutral option.

SB 401 would require a nominal expense for public establishments, about \$15 a sign, but will have an enormous impact on individuals with disabilities, members of the LGBTQ community, and parents of young children.

California, Illinois, and Vermont along with cities like Austin, Baltimore, New York City, Philadelphia, Portland, OR, and Washington, D.C., have passed laws that require gender-neutral, single-occupancy bathrooms, and I ask the members of this Committee to vote in support of this legislation as well.

Thank you.