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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND  
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**SB579: Health Care Facilities – Restrooms – Requirements**  
**Senate Finance Committee | Thursday, February 25, 2021 at 1pm**

There is always a risk of picking up an illness when using a public restroom. The space might not appear to be dirty, but pathogens are likely living on high-touch surfaces. The last place you'd want to worry about getting sick would be in a hospital, but unfortunately, disease transmission happens there too.

In 2019, while at Anne Arundel Medical Center, I used the restroom in the Emergency Department. I was shocked that after washing my hands, I had to blow dry my hands and touch the door handle to exit. Many pathogens from infected individuals are shed specifically in fecal matter, increasing the importance of hand hygiene. In a place with sick people, requiring touchless options (including paper towel dispensers) seems like a no-brainer.

I shared my concerns about hygiene in restrooms with the Maryland Hospital Association (MHA) and the Maryland Health Care Commission (MHCC). After over a year of meetings with MHA, MHCC, and the Maryland Department of Health (MDH), we were making no progress towards a solution. In fact, I was informed that the only way to make these changes would be to file a complaint against every public restroom within a hospital, clinic, and doctor's office. In lieu of this absurd suggestion, I am sponsoring [SB579](#)-- which requires touchless paper towel dispensers and hands-free exit methods for public restrooms in a hospital or health care facility. This would not apply to individual patient rooms with a bathroom. These needed upgrades will help mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in addition to other bacteria, viruses, fecal matter, etc.

The potential for disease transmission increases exponentially when individuals touch the same surfaces. In a 2014 [study by the University of Arizona](#), researchers applied samples of a virus to doorknobs. Within two to four hours, the virus had been picked up by 40-60% of workers and visitors and could be detected on other frequently touched objects.

Many touchless (or "hands-free") options are affordable and easily available. Foot door openers range from \$25-\$50; arm door openers can be purchased for roughly \$50; and hands-free paper towel dispensers cost \$50-\$115.

Especially during this pandemic, it is imperative that we restore public confidence in cleanliness. As we stay masked and socially distanced to protect others, our health institutions should be

required to take prudent steps to keep us safe **before** we get sick. If restaurants and retail stores can provide sanitization stations, PPE, and their own touchless bathroom upgrades, surely our medical facilities can do their part to make needed changes as well!

**I urge a favorable report on SB579.**