

## **Testimony in Support of SB0061 Public Buildings – Changing Facilities – Requirements**

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Like all moms, I think my kid is pretty special. My son Simon has an amazing sense of humor. He's great at Mario Kart, and loves to go swimming. He also has Cerebral Palsy, Epilepsy, Hydrocephalus, Autism, and a unique genetic disorder. He has physical and cognitive disabilities.

For 14 years as Simon's mom and advocate, I've used the term "special" a lot. Unfortunately, I've used less often to describe Simon and more often to try to get him the things he needs.

Special education for learning.

Special needs equipment for getting around.

Special needs activities for being included.

But, the truth is NONE of these things are special. Everyone needs to learn, get around, and be included. What's special is that people with disabilities and those who love them have to ask, advocate, plead, and push for every little ordinary thing.

Even things as basic as public restrooms.

Many kids with disabilities like my son need access to changing tables long past the point baby changing tables can support their weight, and there are no larger tables available. Putting a child on a bathroom floor is unsanitary and undignified. Changing an older child inside a vehicle is not private enough.

As parents and caregivers we do everything we can to protect our children's dignity and privacy; so when a change is needed we're often forced to go home. Limiting our ability to go out and stay out in our community. Limiting our children's opportunities to be included, have fun, and just be kids.

Children with disabilities aren't the only people impacted by this lack of restroom accessibility. Kids with disabilities grow up to be adults with disabilities who want to work and be a part of their communities. Through their service to our country, many veterans become disabled, and they deserve to come home to a community they can fully access. If we're lucky, we will all age and with age comes disability. If we want to "age in place," that place needs to accommodate our basic needs. Disability is a part of life.

Using a public restroom isn't a special need, it's a necessity. Access for people with disabilities isn't a special need; it's a civil right. States like Arizona, California, New Hampshire, and New York have already passed similar bills, letting their citizens with disabilities know they're welcome and wanted in our shared spaces.

I hope Maryland will do the same for my son and thousands of Marylanders like him. Thank you.