

**Support SB486
Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 15, 2022
Testimony of Elizabeth K. Graham**

Testimony in favor of SB 486 Open to All Act

My name is Elizabeth Graham. I am a transgender and autistic woman and I have been a Maryland resident for a good majority of my life. I am giving this testimony in favor of SB0486 the Open to All Act. I am a volunteer co-facilitator of Maryland Trans Unity transgender support group and I work full-time as a Service Coordinator for the Maryland Waiver for Children with Autism. I am helping to represent the transgender and developmental disability communities.

Public bathrooms are often a daily challenge to navigate for people in both communities; many transgender and gender expansive people can and do face danger in these public shared facilities. Children and adults with disabilities might need support in public bathrooms from a support person of a different gender. In my field of autism, many autistic people find the shared public bathrooms overwhelming with different sensory input such as sound and smells; single-occupancy bathrooms help with this sensory overload. It is not uncommon for gender expansive and autistic people to develop health problems as a result of avoiding public bathrooms due to fear.

In the beginning of my gender transition, single-occupancy bathrooms were where I changed clothes to present in a manner consistent with my gender identity. As a child, these bathrooms were a refuge from the loud environment of shared public bathrooms. There were times I would go in a single-occupancy bathroom regardless of the signage, because when you have to go you have to go.

Maryland has passed legislation to protect from discrimination on the basis of gender identity in public accommodations and now offers an X gender marker on state-issued identification. To help complement these past legislative actions, gender-neutral signage on single-occupancy bathrooms is important to ensure equitable access to the transgender and gender-expansive community.

Recently Governor Hogan, in the proposed fiscal year 2023 budget, added \$2.8 million in funding for the Autism Waiver so an additional 100 children can receive home and community based services; he has done similarly in the past. This means that folks with disabilities will be out in the community and need to have equitable access to bathroom facilities.

In other places, having the practical gender-neutral signage for single-occupancy bathrooms is also observed. Please consider the times we may fly on airplanes, travel on trains, and utilize port-a-potties with urinals; often the signage for the bathroom is gender neutral, labeled often as just bathroom or lavatory. It's very practical and everyone seems to be fine with utilizing the same single-occupancy bathroom.

I ask that you pass this bill. It is a crucial legislation that helps to further ensure safe and equitable access to all Marylanders.

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