

HB 572 Testimony – Open to All Act
February 16, 2022

House Economic Matters Committee

Good afternoon Chair Wilson, Vice Chair Crosby, and members of the Committee.

My name is Allan Richardson and I am here today in support of HB 572, The Open to All Act.

I have resided in Maryland for over 70 years, and during that time my wife, Sally, and I greatly enjoyed going out to dinner and attending both folk and classical music performances in venues throughout Maryland. Unfortunately, in recent years Sally battled both dementia and severe loss of mobility. In spite of this, she continued to find great comfort in these outings. They gave us the chance to retain an important part of our former life.

But there were problems. At first, it was difficult for Sally, who had become easily confused, to manage trips to the ladies room alone. I became uncomfortable allowing her to enter restrooms by herself because she would forget where she was. Then later, when she became wheelchair bound, she was completely unable to manage without assistance. Although there were sometimes restrooms accessible to those with disabilities, she could not use these alone. And more often I had to decide whether to bring Sally into the men's restroom or to hire our daytime female caretaker for the evening to assist her. This added a layer of stress (and expense) to our evening that my wife and I did not need.

These are not easy things to discuss in public. But The Open to All Act would alleviate many of these problems by providing free access to all for single use bathrooms. That would help us to manage by ourselves many of the problems we experienced. We all want to be out enjoying events in Maryland and it goes without saying that none of us want to worry about how to access a restroom, regardless of our sex or state of disability.

In conclusion, I thank you for taking the time to consider this bill and ask for a favorable report.