

SB 486 Places of Public Accommodation and Public Buildings - Gender-Inclusive Signage
February 15, 2022

Position: Support

My name is Maria Aragon, and I am writing to wholeheartedly support bill 486, Open to All Act. This bill is a step into creating non-discriminatory spaces for people of different gender identities and accessibility needs. As someone who was born and raised in Maryland, I felt shunned due to outward and subtle anti trans messaging. It wasn't until I was older that I realized I was not the only trans person who felt similar. Thanks to the work of advocates and allies, there has been a change of atmosphere to create visibility and awareness. This does not mean that it is still safe to come out as transgender. The UCLA School of Law Williams Institute estimates, as of 2016, there is slightly over 22,000 transgender individuals in Maryland, however I know in my heart that there are many more transgender folks still unable to identify themselves publicly out of fear. This is why creating accessible spaces, even to use the restroom is an opportunity for a trans person to feel safer.

When I was a student at the University of Maryland, I spearheaded an initiative to create an all gender restroom with the simple change of signage and inclusive welcoming language for The Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center. This Performing Arts Center is a major part of the arts ecology in Maryland and receives various artists and audiences from all over the nation. As a result of creating this inclusive restroom, artists from varying gender identities are now able to perform without the fear of discrimination. This inclusive practice is also seen at the Stamp Student Union at the University of Maryland which houses over 40,000 students. Creating inclusive spaces is possible, not difficult, and has a real impact on the physical well being for trans people to live full lives.

Thank you,

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