

***Testimony at DC Water & Sewer Authority Hearing
Submitted by John McDermott, member the People for Fairness Coalition
Downtown Washington DC Public Restroom Committee
February 25, 2016***

Thank you very much Council Member Cheh for holding this Oversight Committee hearing.

My name is John McDermott. I'm formerly homeless. I live now in an apartment for 8 years now in Northeast Washington DC behind Catholic University. I would like to share with you some of my experiences being on the street.

In 2008 in April I got an idea to form the People for Fairness Coalition (PFC). We have been a coalition for 8 years now. While I was living on the street, I was bathroom challenged. After 10 pm there is nowhere in the city to go to the bathroom. When I first became homeless restaurants coffee shops, and fast food restaurants let you use their bathroom even if you didn't purchase something. In about 2010 restaurants, coffee shops, and fast food restaurants starting placing locks and combinations on their restroom doors in order to limit use to customers. It made it worse for people without housing to use a bathroom. The only way you can use a bathroom is by buying something. That's why you hear complaints about people going to the bathroom in the parks and in allies. Several people living on the street have gotten tickets for urinating and defecating in public.

I think safe, clean public restrooms available 24/7 would be the solution to keep people from urinating and defecating in public.

I want to tell you about an experience I had when I first became homeless. I slept in front the World Bank bookstore on Pennsylvania Ave NW. It's safe because security gave me the OK to sleep there, plus they had cameras, which made it even safer. So, at night when I had to go, I crossed Pennsylvania Ave and 18th to use the bathroom in the park. When I arrived there happened to be a young lady who was less fortunate and didn't have a place to live. She was always going to the bathroom in the park. So I had go be back across the street to wait until she left. Women have to be half naked to go to the bathroom when they urinate or defecate outside.

So bathrooms are very important. Having ready access to a clean, safe bathroom should be a right. When people sleep in churches they sometimes have to go the bathroom so they have to find bushes on the church property to take a leak.

We are hearing about a lot of less fortunate people urinating outside. Not only do we have problems but also people coming out of bars sometimes urinate outside. People think it's the less fortunate and blame it on us.

If we were like the European cities that have public restrooms that are readily accessible we wouldn't have this problem in Washington DC

So we are asking you, Council Member Cheh, to get in contact with Marcia Bernbaum who will be testifying next and let her know that you would like to meet with us so that we can share with you some ideas we have. We would also like to work with you to solve this problem.

I am a member of PFC and one of the members of the PFC's Downtown DC Public Restroom Committee that is working on solving the problem of having restrooms for everybody: the less fortunate, tourists, the working class, people coming downtown to shop.

Thank you very much for hearing my testimony.