



Testimony of Will Handsfield

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Bill 22-0223, the Public Restroom Facilities Installation and Promotion Act of 2017
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION & THE ENVIRONMENT
Mary Cheh, Chair
January 10th, 2018

Good afternoon Councilmember Cheh, Councilmembers, and staff, my name is Will Handsfield and I am the Transportation Director of the Georgetown Business Improvement District.

I am pleased to testify before you today in support of Bill 22-0223, the Public Restroom Facilities Installation and Promotion Act of 2017.

The Georgetown BID represents over 450 retail businesses in Georgetown and we strive to create a welcoming, comfortable environment for visitors to the commercial district. Georgetown is the largest outdoor shopping district in the region, with some of the highest foot traffic counts among major retail streets, and millions of visitors a year. At some point during their visit, many of these visitors will need a restroom. While some businesses currently provide bathroom access to their customers, not all of them do. While shopping malls are able to provide this amenity for all visitors, Georgetown and other commercial districts in the city are not centrally owned or managed places have not found an organized way to provide public bathrooms to visitors. This is why we appreciate this committee providing leadership on public restroom access.

Public restroom access is not only an important visitor amenity, but also a key public health concern. Through this legislation, it may be possible to achieve specific outcomes for bathroom access, such as “one publicly accessible restroom per block in commercial areas,” or some other similar metric.

While others will surely talk about the issues related to constructing new stand-alone restrooms, The Georgetown historic district is real estate constrained, and has very few spaces to build stand-alone public restrooms, so we have focused our attention on the portions of the proposed bill that would support access to restrooms within private businesses, a practice in place in London and other cities.

This past summer, the BID surveyed over 30 retailers and restaurants to assess their willingness to open their restrooms for public use under the terms set out in this bill.

Some of the key takeaways from the survey include:

- Some businesses already make their bathrooms available to the public, but generally do not post exterior signage to indicate this
- Restaurants are more likely to make their bathrooms available than retailers, particularly quick service restaurants

- The primary concerns raised by businesses include maintenance and cleaning, management of appropriate uses, and the flow of bathroom users. This issue may be resolved with some degree of compensation.
- Other concerns include the bill's requirement for ADA access, given that many of the historic buildings in Georgetown do not have ADA accessible doorways; exterior signage content, placement, and branding may conflict with requirements of national tenant home offices; and required hours of operation to receive a subsidy may not completely overlap with operating hours.
- Many of the businesses we spoke with did not express the need for a specific subsidy amount, but among those that did, they expressed that a subsidy of \$1,500 to \$2,500 per year would be compelling. Also, a simple annual subsidy that covers a business's additional cleaning and operating costs would compel more businesses to open up their bathrooms for public use.

The compensation for participating businesses is a key component of this bill. Given that commercial districts across the city have varying levels of foot traffic, operate for different periods of time throughout the day, and deal with different public safety issues, it is important that this committee consider those differences when setting the appropriate subsidy. The demand for and impact of public restroom access will not be the same in every commercial district. Setting a low, but meaningful subsidy via legislation or regulation could be a good starting point, with regular tweaks on price to achieve the desired critical mass of publicly accessible restrooms.

We hope this helps as you consider this legislation, and we look forward to continuing to work with the Council on this issue. Thank you for this opportunity to testify, and I would be happy to answer your questions.