

DOES DOWNTOWN WASHINGTON DC HAVE RESTROOMS THAT ARE CLEAN, SAFE, AND AVAILABLE TO EVERYONE 24/7?¹

*Design, Data Collection, Analysis and Report prepared by the People for Fairness Coalition (PFC) Downtown Washington DC Public Restroom Committee*²

WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DID

People for Fairness Coalition (PFC) was founded by individuals who are without housing, or have been without housing in the past, to ensure access to affordable housing for DC residents through advocacy, outreach, and peer mentoring.

Between December 2014 and February 2015, members of PFC's Downtown Washington DC Public Restroom Committee visited 85 establishments in five areas of downtown Washington, DC in order to find out whether pedestrians in these areas have adequate access to restrooms that are clean, safe, and available at any time of the day or night. We also did an internet search in an effort to identify restrooms in downtown DC that are open to the public 24/7.

We selected the five areas³ based on two criteria:

- Presence of sizable concentrations of individuals who lack housing;
- Heavy foot traffic among pedestrians: tourists, shoppers, diners, people walking through or coming through by bicycle, individuals who are restroom challenged

In each area we visited a sample of food and coffee chains and franchises. We also visited a sample of private restaurants and other private establishments. In all, we visited half of the establishments in each of the five areas.

WHAT WE LEARNED:

1. Who comes to these five areas and why (varies by area):

<i>Who Comes</i>	<i>Why they come</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tourists• Movie goers• Museum goers• Verizon Center attendees• People visiting the library• Shoppers• Diners• Bar goers• Walkers, joggers/bicycle riders• People who lack housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• See historic sites• Attend movies/other entertainment• Visit art galleries/museums• Go shopping• Buy coffee• Eat at food chains/franchises• Fine dining (lunch & dinner)• Go to bars• Passing through• Hang out• In four areas many come via Metro

¹ A more detailed report may be found at www.pfcdc.org/the-restroom.

² The PFC Downtown Washington DC Public Restroom Committee, which began to meet in November of 2014, includes Albert Townsend, Jennifer McLaughlin, John McDermott, George Olivar and Janet Sharp. They are supported by Marcia Bernbaum and Ken Durham. For further information contact Marcy@pfcdc.org or 240-498-4802.

³ The five areas are: *Gallery Place* primarily along 7th St.; *Georgetown* along M St. between 28th and 33rd Sts, *Dupont Circle*, primarily along Connecticut Ave, the *K St. Corridor* between 13th and 17th Sts.; *Columbia Heights* on Irving between 15th and 14th Sts. and on 14th St. between Irving and Park Rd.

2. **Public restrooms are available in/near two of the five areas we visited:**

Area	Public restrooms in/near area
Gallery Place:	Martin Luther King Library (9:30 am – 9:00 pm) National Portrait Gallery (11 am – 7 pm daily) National Building Museum (11 am – 5 pm daily) National Gallery of Art (11 am – 5 pm daily)
K Street Corridor	Lafayette Park (8 am – 2 pm daily) White House Visitors Center (7:30 am – 4 pm daily)
Dupont Circle	---
Georgetown	---
Columbia Heights	---

3. **Restrooms available in private restaurants and food/coffee chains and franchises in the five areas we visited**

Of the 85 establishments that we visited, a little over half (45) let us use their restrooms.

99% of the restrooms that we entered were clean & safe

74% were in private restaurants

49% were in coffee/food chains & franchises

Restrooms available from 5 am until midnight:	<i>Gallery Place & Dupont Circle</i>
No restrooms available until 10 am:	<i>Georgetown & Columbia Heights</i>
Very few restrooms available after 6 pm:	<i>K St. Corridor</i>

None were clearly marked as having restrooms open to the public.

4. **Restrooms in/near downtown DC that are open to the public 24/7**

We identified seven restroom facilities open to the public 24/7 that are clean, safe, and available to anyone who enters: 3 are owned by the government; 4 are privately owned

Owned by the Government

Privately Owned

*Union Station, (500 Mass. Ave. NE)
Lincoln Memorial (900 Ohio Dr. NW)
Jefferson Memorial, (708 E Basin Dr. SE)*

*Giant Food (1345 Park Rd, NW)
Safeway (1855 Wisconsin Ave. NW)
Safeway, (490 L St. NW)
7-11 (504 19th St NW)*

Columbia Heights was the only area we visited that has a restroom (Giant Food) open 24/7. To get to the nearest restroom in the other four areas that are open 24/7, it is necessary to walk between a half-mile and 1 mile from downtown.

The Lincoln & Jefferson memorials are between 1.5 and 2 miles from the nearest downtown area we visited and require walking in areas that aren't well lit.

There are no signs indicating that these restrooms exist, and none are clearly marked.

OTHER FINDINGS

1. Restrooms at metro stops are for customers only

WMATA's policy limits restroom access to customers who have an emergency, small children, the elderly, and the disabled

Station managers can, at their discretion, give access to other customers.

2. The following coffee and food chains & franchises in downtown make their restrooms available to the public in some of their locations, while at other locations access to restrooms is limited to customers only:

Starbucks,	The Corner Bakery,
McDonalds,	Cosi,
Subway,	Five Guys, Shop
Dunkin Donuts,	House, Sweet Greens,
Au Bon Pain,	Pizzeria Paradiso

3. Managers of chains and franchises can decide whether to close their restrooms to the public, and they are increasingly doing so.

OUR CONCLUSIONS

When you are in downtown Washington DC and you urgently have to go

Unless you know the area, you could have a hard time finding a restroom that will let you in during the day and in the evening.

There are a limited number of public restrooms, which are not marked and have limited hours.

- Public libraries (only 2 in downtown DC)
- Museums and memorials along the National Mall
- Lafayette Square and the White House Visitors Center

Private establishments with restrooms may or may not to let you use their restroom unless you are a customer. They are also not marked.

- Half of the coffee/food chains & franchises we visited have locks on their restrooms doors. Managers are increasingly using this practice.
- Depending on where you are, you may or may not be able to find private establishments with restrooms available early in the morning or in the evening.

It will be extremely difficult to find a restroom late at night/early in the morning

There are only 7 restrooms open to the public 24/7 in downtown Washington DC, they aren't marked either

- With the exception of Columbia Heights, none of the four other areas we visited has a restroom that is open 24/7.
- In the remaining four areas, you will have to walk between a half-mile and a mile to find a restroom open 24/7.
- Four of the seven accessible restrooms are privately owned; while currently open to the public, managers can limit restroom access at their discretion.

This study clearly confirms that there IS a problem when it comes to access to clean, safe public restrooms open 24/7 in downtown Washington DC. It also raises some important questions that we plan to address in future studies: one is the experience of individuals who are housing unstable when they seek restrooms.