

Testimony for February 17, 2017 Department of Health Oversight Hearing

**Submitted by Marcia Bernbaum, People for Fairness Coalition
Downtown Washington DC Public Restroom Initiative**

Good morning Council Member Gray, Department of Health Director Nesbitt, members of the Committee on Health. My name is Marcia Bernbaum. I am a member of the People for Fairness Coalition. I serve as mentor and advisor to PFFCs Downtown Washington DC Public Restroom Initiative.

I would like to focus today's testimony on the following topics:

- Why having clean, safe available public restrooms is critical to personal health and public health and why it makes good business sense.
- Compare public restroom availability in downtown areas of European and Asian capitals with the reality of public restroom availability in downtown DC.
- Brief you on our Downtown DC Public Restroom Initiative: our accomplishments and what we are involved in over the coming months.
- We would also like to lend our support for the Public Restroom Facilities Task Force Bill 22-61 that was inspired by our Public Restroom Initiative.

Why access to public restrooms is critical to personal health

I am attaching to this testimony excerpts from three articles that show why access to public restrooms is critical to personal health. They come from: the National Institutes of Health, the Scandinavian Journal of Nephrology, and the American Restroom Association.

These articles make the following points:

- People who suffer from intermittent or chronic medical conditions that cause them to frequently need to use a restroom are limited in their choice of work and shopping locations, and in their participation in physical fitness activities, and by the limited availability of public toilet facilities.
- Women generally need to urinate more frequently than men. Adverse health effects that may result from voluntary urinary retention include increased frequency of urinary tract infections (UTIs), which can lead to more serious infections and, in rare situations, renal damage.
- Medical evidence shows that health problems can result if individuals delay defecation: constipation, abdominal pain, diverticuli, and hemorrhoids.

Human fecal waste is a health hazard

We all know how disagreeable it is to be walking down the street and either suddenly smell and/or step on human or animal feces. Urine emits a very disagreeable smell, not to mention that it degrades lampposts and telephone poles, and damages cars. Cleaning up wastes water, and detergents are damaging for the environment. While urine is not a health hazard, human feces definitely pose a health hazard:

- Human feces may contain a range of disease-causing organisms, including viruses, bacteria and eggs or larvae of parasites
- Once out of the body feces are subjected to environmental bacteria that may use the excrement as food and thrive. The longer the stool has been outside the body, the more potential for harmful bacteria to inhabit the gases originating from the fecal material.

Access to public restrooms makes good business sense

- Knowing that there are public restrooms nearby, tourists visiting Washington DC are more apt to leave the Mall to eat and shop in downtown DC's commercial areas, thus contributing to DC's economy.
- People who are restroom challenged (seniors, pregnant women, individuals taking certain medication), knowing that there are accessible public restrooms nearby, are more apt to come to areas to shop.
- Fewer people will ask businesses to use their restrooms.
- And there will be less poop to scoop as well urine to scrub off of buildings, sidewalks, lampposts and other areas.

If other capital cities place priority on having clean, safe, available public restrooms why can't our nation's capital do the same?

Capitals in Europe and Asia recognize the importance – from a public health, personal health, and business perspective, -- of investing in clean, safe public restrooms that are readily accessible to shoppers, walkers, joggers, and tourists in their downtown areas.

In Great Britain, for example, the Greater British Public Toilet Map lists 8,000 public restrooms throughout the Island. App users can identify public restrooms near a specific location along with characteristics of each public restroom. Germany and Australia have similar maps.

By way of contrast, if you are in downtown DC and you are outside of the Mall you will have a very difficult time finding a clean, safe public restroom. There are only three public restrooms that are open 24/7 in all of Washington DC: Union Station, the Lincoln and Jefferson Memorials. And there are a total of 5, soon to be 4, public restrooms downtown that are open during the day. Two are located near the White House – at Lafayette Square and the White House Visitor's Center. Three are located near Gallery Place - the National Portrait Gallery, the National Building

Museum, and the MLK Library, which will be closing in early March for 3 years. There are no signs to direct you to available public restrooms. If you are downtown in the early hours and urgently have to go, chances are you will have to walk a long distance to find an open public restroom that is if you know where they are.

PFFC's Downtown DC Public Restroom Initiative

Since PFFC launched its Downtown DC Public Restroom Initiative a little over two years ago we have:

- Identified viable options for installing and maintaining clean, safe available public restrooms including specific information on the costs of purchasing, installing, and maintaining them.
- Learned from best practices of other cities in the US that have in recent years have successfully installed and maintained public restrooms with these characteristics.
- Designed and carried out two restroom inventories in downtown areas of DC where we have visited private facilities in five areas of downtown DC that have public restrooms in order to find out if we are let in without purchasing something.

In keeping with lessons learned/best practices from other cities, we are currently in the process of building support for public restrooms from ANCs, neighborhood associations, churches, and BIDs at the community level. We are also reaching out to associations of hotel owners, restaurant owners that support seniors and individuals with disabilities to obtain their endorsement.

We are very pleased that our Initiative served as the inspiration for the Public Restroom Facilities Task Force Bill introduced by Council Member Brianne Nadeau and will be reaching out to the five DC Council Members who co-introduced this Bill as well as members of the Committee on Health.

We look forward, once the Task Force begins its work, to having a seat on the Task Force and to providing support in any way we can. We also look forward to having the opportunity to meet with your and Committee on Health staff to share more information on public restroom options and lessons learned from other cities in the US and elsewhere.

I am attaching to this testimony:

1. The information sources used to document the personal and public health hazards of limited access to restrooms.
2. Information on three options for clean, safe, available public restrooms.
3. A list of who is restroom challenged.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to testify.

ATTACHMENT 1

Personal and Public Health Information Sources

Why access to public restrooms is critical to personal health

American Restroom Association¹: There are numerous health concerns associated with limited access to public toilets, resulting in both physical and psychological difficulties. Many people suffer either intermittent or chronic medical conditions that cause them to frequently need to use a restroom. These persons hesitate to travel or they avoid outdoor activities that put them out of range of toilet facilities. This situation is not only inconvenient, but life altering. These otherwise productive individuals are limited in their choice of work locations, in their participation in physical fitness activities, and to where and how they travel by the limited availability of public toilet facilities.

Scandinavian Journal of Nephrology²: Medical studies show the importance of regular urination, with women generally needing to void more frequently than men. Adverse health effects that may result from voluntary urinary retention include increased frequency of urinary tract infections (UTIs), which can lead to more serious infections and, in rare situations, renal damage.

National Institutes of Health³: Medical evidence shows that health problems, including constipation, abdominal pain, diverticula, and hemorrhoids, can result if individuals delay defecation

Human fecal waste is a health hazard.

According to the World Health Organization⁴ "Human feces may contain a range of disease-causing organisms, including viruses, bacteria and eggs or larvae of parasites"

Matt Russell, Ph.D. in Biochemistry, Cellular and Molecular Biology from the University of Tennessee adds⁵:" Once out of the body these stools are subjected to environmental bacteria that may use the excrement as food and thrive. It is very common for bacteria to inhabit aerosols.... the longer the stool has been outside the body, the more potential for harmful bacteria to inhabit the aerosols originating from it."

¹ J. Schmidt, J and Brubaker, R. The Code and Practice of Toilets in the United States of America, www.americanrestroom.org/wto/wts04_paper.pdf

² Nielsen, A. Waite, W., "Epidemiology of Infrequent Voiding and Associated Symptoms," Scandinavian Journal of Urology and Nephrology. Supplementum 157, pg.49-53, January 1994

³ National Institutes of Health (NIH) Publication No. 95-2754, July 1995.

⁴ http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/hygiene/emergencies/em2002chap8.pdf

⁵ Matt Russell, Ph.D. in Biochemistry, Cellular and Molecular Biology from the University of Tennessee

ATTACHMENT 2
Public Restroom Options

PORLAND LOO

	<p>Designed, at request of Portland, OR Mayor, to avoid being used for illicit Activities.</p> <p>Installed and successfully maintained In 12 cities in US and Canada; number of Cities growing.</p> <p>Attractive</p> <p>Open 24/7</p> <p>Clean</p> <p>Safe</p> <p>\$90,000 purchase</p> <p>\$30,000/yr. maintenance</p> <p>\$25,000 - \$35,000 installation if Close to water/sewer lines</p>
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AUTOMATIC PUBLIC TOILET

	<p>May be found in New York City and San Francisco; many cities in Europe & Asia</p> <p>Attractive</p> <p>Open 24/7</p> <p>Clean</p> <p>Safety issues</p> <p>\$250,000 - \$1,000,000 purchase</p> <p>\$100,000 - \$150,000/yr. maintenance</p> <p>\$25,000 - \$35,000 installation if close to water/sewer lines</p>
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CITY OF LONDON COMMUNITY TOILET SCHEME



Government provides a financial incentive to private businesses to make their toilets available to public

Businesses display special stickers in their windows

Signs indicate where they are located

70 participating businesses in London

In use in other cities in England, Germany, and throughout Australia

ATTACHMENT 3
Who the Restroom Challenged Are
(from the American Restroom Association website⁶)

- Middle age women (NAFC)
- Pregnant women
- Parents touring with young children
- Children in School
- Women experiencing an irregular menses
- People suffering certain congenital defects
- Those with bladder cancer (2)
- Some wounded Combat Veterans
- Victims of abdominal or nerve trauma
- Women being treated for Vaginal Candidiasis*
- 10 to 40% of Stroke victims
- Otherwise healthy persons suffering bowel incontinence
- People with Interstitial Cystitis
- Those suffering Irritable Bowel Syndrome, Ulcerative Colitis
- The Elderly (functional capacity is halved as we age.)
- Patients suffering the diuretic effect of blood pressure medicine
- Men suffering an enlarged prostate
- Diners experiencing the diuretic effect of coffee or alcohol
- Patients on medications that act as bowel or bladder irritants
- Ostomy pouches require prompt attention when at capacity

⁶ <https://americanrestroom.org/pr/who.htm>