

***Testimony delivered at March 15, 2017 Committee on Human Services
Oversight Hearing on the Department of Human Services
by Marcia Bernbaum***

Committee on Human Services Chair Nadeau, DHS Director Zeilinger, ICH Director Greenwalt, members of the Human Services Committee,

My name is Marcia Bernbaum. I consider myself privileged to be one of the few members of the People for Fairness Coalition who has never had to face the daunting challenges of lacking a place I can call home. And I am a proud member of PFFC's Downtown Washington DC Public Restroom Initiative.

I would like to start my testimony by thanking you for your amazing support. When we met with you in November 2016 never in our wildest dreams did we imagine that our presentation would serve as the inspiration for the Public Restroom Facilities Task Force Act of 2017 that you introduced in January of this year. On behalf of the restroom challenged in DC; the homeless; tourists; joggers and bikers; and businesses who will eventually be beneficiaries we thank you for giving visibility to this important need and for taking action to address it.

We have come a long way since the Fall of 2014 when we started looking at the issue by doing necessary background research, designed, and began carrying out a strategy reflecting best practices and lessons learned from other cities that have successfully installed and maintained clean, safe, available public restrooms. Through grit and determination, faith that through hard work and perseverance we will eventually achieve our goal, and more recently your support we now have reason to believe that there is light at the end of the tunnel.

Since we met with you last November we have delivered a number of successful presentations that have resulted in eight endorsements to date and counting. We are making good progress in building support within the Dupont Circle community. We have the support of two BIDs which experience elsewhere has shown is fundamental. Over the next two weeks we will be delivering presentations to six of your fellow DC Council Members and their staffers.

The literature shows that readily available clean, safe public restrooms are critical for the restroom challenged, beneficial to businesses and for tourism, and very importantly for individuals who lack stable housing. It is no wonder that, for these reasons, easy access to clean, safe public restrooms is a no brainer for our neighbors in large cities in Europe and Asia. Chances are if you are walking on a downtown street of London, Paris, Singapore, Beijing, or Tokyo and urgently have to go you will have no trouble finding a clean, safe public restroom nearby.

I would like to close with a personal story. Many years ago when my daughter, who is currently a doctor, was a little over two years old I was in a store on Connecticut Ave near Dupont Circle when little Leah told me that she had to go. As we know little children have small bladders, which makes it hard to hold it in when the urge comes. I asked the storeowner if we could use the restroom to which she responded no. When I told her that this meant that Leah may end up peeing on the floor of the store, she reluctantly let us use it.

I would like to ask, is resorting to threatening to pee on the floor what one must do to get access to a restroom in a case of urgency?

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to testify.