

Testimony of Reverend Dr. Catriona Laing
Church of the Epiphany
Hearing on Bill 22-0223: Public Restroom Facilities Installation & Promotion Act of
2017
January 10, 2018

Committee Chair Cheh, members of the Committee on Transportation & Environment,

My name is Catriona Laing. I am Associate Priest at the Church of the Epiphany located on 1317 G St NW in the heart of downtown Washington DC.

I am here to lend my support to Bill 22-0223 in three capacities: as assistant pastor serving a church in Downtown DC which has many congregants who need ready access to clean, safe public restrooms; as a mother of small children; and as a British citizen who has benefited from having ready access to clean, safe public restrooms when in London and other cities and who frequently need to use the bathroom. On July 12, 2017 I sent, on behalf of the Church of the Epiphany a letter to you endorsing Bill 22-0223 which you graciously acknowledged.

The community at Church of the Epiphany, where I serve, includes a larger number of senior citizens. As I believe you are aware, as people get older their bladders become smaller. When they have to go they have to go urgently. We also have members who are diabetic, who are on diuretics, who have had strokes. They too would benefit from easy access to public restrooms.

The congregation and the community we serve both in the week and on Sundays also consists of a sizeable number of people whose lives are impacted by homelessness. These include individuals of all ages and from a variety of backgrounds. People who are experiencing homelessness, like all of us, need and deserve to have the dignity of knowing that they have access to clean, safe public restrooms when they have to go. Instead, they are often turned away from private facilities with restrooms. And, those that sleep on the streets, in alleys, and parks suffer the indignity during the night when they have to go of having no choice but to urinate or defecate outside. Among the homeless are individuals who are elderly, with small children, and other conditions that force them, when they have the urge, to need to find a place to go urgently.

My heart goes out to these people who, having had a bad break in life, are living on the streets. On countless occasions I have encountered homeless individuals who haven't been able to hold it in and who have ended up soiling their clothing. Imagine, the mortification and embarrassment of having that happen to you, of knowing that you smell and may not have ready access to clean clothing! Not to mention that in the

District urinating and defecating outside is a misdemeanor punishable by up to \$500 and/or 90 days in jail. Individuals who are homeless are not the only ones subject to fines for urinating or defecating outside. However, homeless individuals when caught cannot pay the fine. And ending up in jail earns them a record that will hurt their prospects for obtaining housing or employment.

On a more personal note, as the mother of small children, I know how difficult it is for toddlers who have tiny bladders and little control over when they need to use the facilities. This is especially acute while they learn to transition from diapers. Again, access to public restrooms would make a huge difference to parents of small children who live in or visit downtown DC.

In England, where I lived until 2015 and also served in a downtown Church, lack of clean, safe, public restrooms is not a problem. Our local governments appreciate that access to clean, safe public restrooms is critical for personal and public health. Accordingly, they have made an effort to install clean, safe public restrooms in multiple locations. We even have apps which direct us to these restrooms!

In closing, I find myself hearing the words of Jesus: *“when I was hungry you fed me, when I was thirsty you gave me something to drink, when I was cold you gave me clothing, when I was sick you cared for me, when I was in prison you visited me...what you did for the least of these, you did for me”*. Speaking as someone who firmly believes that we all are equal in the eyes of God, all entitled to live dignified lives, and that we all deserve to be in conditions that maximize our health and dignity, I encourage the Committee on Transportation & Environment to pass Bill 22-0223.

Thank you very much.