

**Testimony of George Olivar
at the January 10, 2018 Hearing on Bill 22-0223 chaired by the
Committee on Transportation and Environment**

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

My name is George Olivar. I am 71 years old. I came to Texas from Mexico in 1973 and became a US citizen where I spent 20 years working for the Texas Governor and for the Texas Commission for the Deaf. I am a Buddhist and in 1994 I decided to go to Asia where I served as a monk in several monasteries. When I returned to the US 20 years later, in 2014 at age 67, I decided to come to Washington DC because the Library of Congress has the best collection of literature on Buddhism in the US and I wanted to study that literature. Since arriving in Washington DC I have had a difficult time as a senior finding a job. I found that I could not live on my Social Security so I became homeless.

For 8 months I slept outside on the street, in parks, and in alleys before entering a homeless shelter. I'm diabetic and I need to use a restroom frequently. While living on the street I had a very hard time finding restrooms in part because many restaurants only permit patrons to use their restrooms. I try my best to hold it in as much as I can. Because of my diabetic condition sometimes after I eat I have diarrhea and I have to find a restroom urgently. There are times when I have had an accident. It is embarrassing because I smell afterwards.

I have learned a lot living with the homeless. There are many different people who are homeless and who live on the street. Some are very smart, some are sick, some are mentally ill. They all need to find a restroom when they have to go. I am not the only homeless person who is diabetic. When a homeless person smells, it is often not because he/she has not taken a bath but because the person has had an accident in their pants due to not being able to find a restroom.

The only public restroom that I know of is in Lafayette Park in front of the White House. When I have to go I often find that there is a long line, due to tourists who are also looking for a restroom. There is a McDonald's on 13th St and NY Avenue but I am usually required to purchase something in order to use the restroom. At Union Station, which has a public restroom open 24/7, I have found that the police will not let me use it at night because I don't have a train ticket. I have seen tourists urinating and defecating outside in front of the Supreme Court because they can't find restroom. When I saw a young lady having an accident in front of the Supreme Court I could see that she was very embarrassed. I wanted to help her but I couldn't.

I have found that when a policeman catches you urinating or defecating in public, you run the risk of getting a fine of up to \$500 and/or 90 days in jail. One of my friends was caught by a policemen urinating outside and he received a fine.

People like me, when I lived on the streets, are not the only ones who suffer when they can't find a restroom. Tourists visiting DC, as I mentioned above, businessmen, joggers, families with little children, people in wheelchairs suffer because they often have a very difficult time finding a restroom. Sometime when they find a restroom it is dirty.

I lived at the CCNV shelter for one year before finding housing. When I came in, CCNV was remodeling some of its restrooms. For the first 6 months I was at CCNV there were only two toilets for 300 men and two for 100 women. If at night they have to go, they often have to wait and hold it in.

You may have read that San Diego and more recently Los Angeles have had Hepatitis A epidemics. In San Diego several people who contracted Hepatitis A died. While there are many ways to contract Hepatitis A, one is through ingestion of a small amount of fecal matter. The authorities in San Diego are so concerned that they are installing more public restrooms to reduce the possibility of infection. Fecal matter inadvertently picked up on the street has other pathogens that can spread from the skin to the eyes, nose and mouth .

We need more clean, safe, public restrooms available 24/7 in Washington DC. Everyone needs to find a place where they can urinate and defecate in a safe environment.

I urge the Committee on Transportation & Environment to take what I have shared in consideration, along with other testimonies, in supporting Bill 22-0223.

Thank you very much.