

Testimony of Beth Merricks
Department of General Services Budget Hearing
April 4, 2019

Councilmember White, members of the Committee on Facilities and Procurement, Director of the Department of General Services (DGS) Anderson.

My name is Beth Merricks. I am a resident of Ward 2 and live near Dupont Circle. I am testifying as a senior, an active bicyclist and walker, and someone who believes that everyone should have ready access to clean, safe, public restrooms.

I urge you to do what you can to ensure that the D.C. Council FY 2020 Markup contains the \$336,000 needed to cover the first-year costs of implementing Bill 22-0223, Public Restroom Facilities Installation and Promotion Act of 2018, which was passed by unanimous vote by the D.C. Council in December 2018.

Bill 22-0223 directs an interagency Working Group, composed of 9 D.C. Agencies (of which DGS is one) and 5 representatives from private sector entities, to explore the feasibility of installing clean, safe, public restrooms in needed areas of D.C. and, if considered feasible, recommend two pilots: (1) two stand-alone public restrooms open 24/7; and (2) a pilot program to provide incentives to businesses to open their restrooms to the public. My understanding is that if the \$336,000 needed to cover the estimated first-year costs of implementing the public restroom pilots is not available, it will not be possible for the Working Group to be formed.

I am an active member of the Dupont Circle Village (DCV), a nonprofit organization that connects members to one another, provides information, cultural and social activities, services, and supports. Membership enables Villagers to maintain their health and homes as they embrace the benefits and challenges of aging. The DCV has over 250 members between the ages of 55 and 90. I am proud to say that in the Spring of 2017 the DCV formally endorsed--through the People for Fairness Coalition's (PFFC) Downtown D.C. Public Restroom Initiative--clean, safe, public restrooms for needed areas in Washington, D.C.

I am also a member of several local bicycling organizations including the Washington Area Bicyclist Association (WABA)--which also endorsed PFFC's Initiative.

I first learned about PFFC's Downtown D.C. Public Restroom Initiative three years ago when I read a letter to the editor in the Northwest Current. After signing their petition, I contacted a member of the Initiative and subsequently attended one of their weekly meetings. I have been following their work since then. I was delighted when a Bill was introduced, inspired by their Initiative and based on lessons learned and best practices that they have identified, to do something about our lack of public restrooms in the District.

My friends will tell you that I have been an advocate of clean, safe, public restrooms for many years. As bicyclists and walkers, my friends and I spend a considerable amount of time outside. It is important for us to be able to find clean, safe, readily available restrooms when the need arises. Since there are very few public restrooms in D.C. and there are no signs to tell us where they are, we stop at restaurants or stores and ask to use their restrooms. Sometimes we are allowed to do so but the expectation is that we will purchase something, even if we don't want or need anything except to use their restrooms. This is not ideal for us, especially if we need to make multiple restroom stops, which is usually the case during a two- or three-hour outing.

I would like to add that I have traveled to many U.S. and foreign cities. As a tourist, I find cities with clean, safe, readily available public restrooms to be much more welcoming and sanitary than those without them. It is embarrassing to me that the capital of the United States--one of the richest countries in the world--cannot provide for the basic restroom needs of its citizens and visitors.

In closing, I urge you to take action to identify the \$336,000 needed for the first-year restroom pilots provided for under Bill 22-0223.

Thank you.