

**Testimony at Department of General Services Oversight Hearing  
Submitted by Marcia Bernbaum, Mentor and Advisor to the  
PFFC Downtown DC Public Restroom Initiative  
February 20, 2018**

Committee Chair Cheh, members of the Committee on Transportation & Environment,  
Department of General Services Director Gillis,

My name is Marcia Bernbaum. I am testifying today in my capacity as Mentor & Advisor to the People for Fairness Coalition (PFFC) Downtown DC Public Restroom Initiative. Our goal is to persuade the DC government to install and maintain clean, safe public restrooms available to everyone in needed areas of Downtown DC.

I am testifying at today's Hearing because, if the Public Restroom Installation and Promotion Act of 2017 (Bill 22-0223) becomes law and funds are set aside for implementing the provisions in the Bill, it is likely that the Department of General Services will be the Agency that will have primary responsibility for implementing one of its provisions, namely: installing and maintaining one or more clean, safe, stand-alone public restrooms open 24/7.

Our research on lessons learned and best practices in other cities in the US and Europe -- that have successfully installed and maintained clean, available safe public restrooms available 24/7 -- served as the inspiration for Bill 22-0223. The guidelines included in Bill 22-0223 incorporate best practices and lessons learned from this research.

Bill 22-0223, for which a formal hearing was held last month, is currently in the Mark-Up phase. As currently drafted Bill 22-0223 directs the Administration to establish a Working Group consisting of DGS, DC Water, DDOT, DHS, NPR, and DPW that will be responsible for:

1. Identifying – with ANC, BID, and other community participation and buy-in -- up to 10 sites in areas of the District with limited access to public restroom facilities that are appropriate for installing a stand-alone public restroom;
2. Authorizing the creation of a subsidy program for private entities to open their restrooms to the public

I would like today s to provide background information that you as DGS Director and other relevant DGS staff might find useful in envisioning what would be required in order to install and maintain one or more stand-alone public restrooms were Bill 22-0223 become law.

To this end, I am using Dupont Circle as a hypothetical example, with the anticipation that the stand-alone public restroom to be installed and maintained would be the Portland Loo – the option that we know the most about and which we believe best meets best practices from

cities that have successfully installed and maintained clean, safe, available public restrooms and which are reflected in the guidelines included in Bill 22-0223.

## **SELECTING AN APPROPRIATE SITE FOR A STAND-ALONE PUBLIC RESTROOM**

Bill 22-0223 directs the Working Group to use the following criteria for selecting possible sites for stand-alone public restrooms.

- The site should be near a water and sewer connection in order to reduce installation costs.
- For purposes of safety and to avoid its being used for illicit purposes, the restroom should be in a visible location that can be easily viewed by a variety of eyes: pedestrians passing by, bikers, joggers, occupants of vehicles entering Dupont Circle, nearby businesses.
- To ensure community acceptance as well as the probability that community members will keep an eye out on what is happening at/near the restroom, it is imperative that local community organizations and businesses be consulted in advance and agree that a stand-alone public restroom be installed and its location.
- In addition to having provisions in place for community monitoring, provisions should be in place for police monitoring.

### **How Dupont Circle meets these criteria:**

- Access to water and sewer connections: We have reason to believe that water and sewer connections exist near the circle. The fact that the small brick structure located in the triangular piece of land where Massachusetts Avenues and P St. converge used to be a Comfort Station until it was closed down in the early 1950s would suggest that there is water and sewer connection nearby.
- Visibility: Were the stand-alone restroom to be installed either in front of this building on the existing grass area or across the street on a wide sidewalk area on P St next to the CVS, it would be easily visible to people on the circle, pedestrians walking along P St and Connecticut Ave, and individuals in cars going around the circle.
- There is a need for a public restroom at Dupont Circle given the high concentration of pedestrian and other traffic: The sidewalks along Connecticut Ave., north and south of Dupont Circle, are filled with pedestrians during the day (shoppers, tourists, people coming in and out of the two Dupont Circle Metro exits, people going to and returning from work in the many office buildings along Connecticut Ave). Capital Bike Share has a location directly across from Dupont Circle for people interested in renting a bicycle. At night the streets of Connecticut Ave are filled with people going to and from Dupont Circle's many restaurants,

bars, and night clubs. The nearest public restroom to Dupont Circle is .8 miles away and businesses are increasingly limiting restroom access to patrons. At some point, many of these people will have to go when nature calls.

- Several organizations in the Dupont Circle area have already bought into the idea of having a clean, safe public restroom in their neighborhood. Thanks to the outreach that we have carried out under our Downtown DC Public Restroom Initiative, the following organizations enthusiastically support having a clean, safe stand-alone public restroom that is available 24/7 installed near Dupont Circle: ANC2B, the Dupont Circle Citizen’s Association, the Dupont Circle Village, Friends Meeting of Washington DC, and the Foundry United Methodist Church.

### **SELECTING A STAND-ALONE PUBLIC RESTROOM THAT IS CLEAN, SAFE, AND ECONOMICAL**

Bill 22-0223 directs the Working Group to use the following criteria for selecting an appropriate stand-alone public restroom model to be installed at the site.

- In addition to being installed in a visible area where there be community and police monitoring; the structure itself must also be designed to include provisions for safety.
- Among the safety considerations, the design should include provisions to discourage illicit use.
- To the extent possible the structure selected should be economical: to purchase, install, and maintain;
- It should be designed to maximize use so as to increase the return on the investment.
- The structure should be easy to clean and maintain

#### **How the Portland Loo meets these criteria.**

- Ensuring safety and safeguarding against illicit use: The Portland Loo was designed using Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) guidelines ([www.cpted.net](http://www.cpted.net)). CPTED features include: louvers at the top and bottom so that one can see how many people are inside and hear what they are saying/doing and, as necessary report anything that looks suspicious; lighting inside when being used and outside at night so that it is easily visible from a distance. There is also an option for remote monitoring and control.

Other safety features covered above include its being located in an open visible area, community members and businesses keeping an eye out in order to identify anything

suspicious happening in/near the structure and arranging for the DC police to include this site in its evening patrol.

- Purchase and installation costs: The Portland Loo costs \$90,000. Another \$3,000 - 5,000 would be required to transport it from Portland, where it is manufactured, to the hypothetical Dupont Circle site. Installation costs (including connecting it to water and sewer) range from \$32,000 to \$38,000 if the water and sewer connection is nearby <sup>1</sup>. When compared with the other option, the Automated Public Toilet whose purchase price ranges between \$250,000 and \$1,000,000, the Portland Loo purchase price is far lower.
- Keeping the structure clean, maintaining it, and maintenance costs: The Portland Loo is built with a heavy duty stainless steel structure which is designed to be durable. It is designed to be maintained manually <sup>2</sup>. Depending on level of use, someone would come to clean it 2 to 4 times per day taking up to 30 minutes each time the person comes. Given that this would not require a full time FTE, it would make sense to contract with an organization that is already responsible for keeping the area clean. Options, using the hypothetical example of Dupont Circle, include: Historic Dupont Circle Main Streets or the Dupont Circle BID which is in the process of being formed.

Assuming that the hourly rate is \$22 (\$15 plus overhead to the organization)<sup>3</sup> and the restroom is maintained 7 days/week, the annual maintenance cost would range between \$7,920 and \$15,840 adding another \$3,000 per year for wear and tear to the structure (e.g. change a lock; replace a panel). Annual maintenance costs for APTs range between \$100,000 and \$150,000.

- Minimize long lines and maximize use: In order to both minimize long lines and to reduce occupancy time, the Portland Loo does not include a wash basin inside. Instead there is a button outside that provides water for hand washing and to fill bottles.

Before closing, I would like to note that in his testimony representing the Administration at the January 10 hearing on Bill 22-0223, DGS Chief Operating Officer Davis expressed concern about stand-alone public restrooms citing serious issues with safety and cleanliness at a stand-alone public restroom installed off 14<sup>th</sup> St. near Girard St on the property of the Columbia Heights Community Center.

A quick look at the location and the structure installed suggests that CPTED criteria were not used either in selecting the location (it is not visible to people on the street and cars driving by)

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<sup>1</sup> Utility work (water, sewer, electric) costs \$22,000-\$25,000; foundation work runs \$7,000 to \$9,000; and Installation of the structure (crane, labor, hookup) costs \$3,000 to \$4,000

<sup>2</sup> The Portland Loo has a self-contained supply cabinet attached to the back of the structure.

<sup>3</sup> These are the rates that the Georgetown BID uses to pay its clean team and for overhead.

or in selecting the restroom model (which is totally closed making it easily used for prostitution and other purposes).

I am attaching to this testimony a two handout which we use to show the lessons learned/best practices that are included in Bill 22-0223 along with illustrations of the two options that we have identified for stand-alone public restrooms.

I hope that the information provided in this testimony and the attachments is useful. Please don't hesitate to contact us if you would like further information or have any questions. You can learn more about our Downtown DC Public Restroom Initiative and the research we have done at [www.pffc.org/what-we-do/public-restrooms](http://www.pffc.org/what-we-do/public-restrooms). I can be reached at: mbern362@aol.com

## Bill 22-0223

### Public Restroom Facilities Installation & Promotion Act of 2017

**Goal:** clean, safe public restrooms available for EVERYONE in needed areas of downtown DC.

**Based on lessons learned and best practices** from other cities in the US and elsewhere that have successfully installed and maintained clean, safe public restrooms available to everyone.

**Inspired by** People for Fairness Coalition (PFFC) Downtown DC Public Restroom Initiative ([www.pffcdc.org/what-we-do/public-restrooms](http://www.pffcdc.org/what-we-do/public-restrooms)) and its research.

#### LESSONS LEARNED/BEST PRACTICES

##### Key considerations in selecting sites for stand-alone public restrooms

1. Located in visible areas
2. High level of pedestrian traffic,
3. Input and support from the surrounding community,
4. Near water and sewer facilities,
5. Provisions in place for both community and police monitoring.

##### Key considerations in selecting stand-alone public restrooms

1. Designed with safety considerations in mind
2. Include provisions to discourage illicit use
3. Encourage users to spend a limited amount of time in the facility in order to maximize restroom use
4. Kept clean
5. Reasonable in price
6. Easy to maintain
7. Arranging for signs so that users can identify restrooms locations

## **PORTLAND LOO**



Designed to avoid being used for illicit activities and for easy maintenance.

Installed and successfully maintained in 20 cities in US and Canada; number of cities in US growing.

Attractive

Open 24/7

Clean

Safe

\$93,000 - \$95,000 purchase/transport.

\$32,000 - \$38,000 installation if close to water/sewer lines

\$12,000 - \$20,000/yr. maintenance (depending on location and labor costs)

## **AUTOMATED PUBLIC TOILET (APT)**



Several models: Found in New York City, San Francisco, Boston, many cities in Europe & Asia

Attractive

Open 24/7

Generally clean, issues with cleanliness in some locations

Safety issues in some locations

\$250,000 - \$1,000,000 purchase/transport

\$32,000 - \$38,000 installation if close to a water/sewer line

\$100,000 - \$150,000/yr. maintenance