

Testimony of George Olivar
January 29, 2020 Joint Oversight Hearing
Departments of Human Services & Housing & Neighborhood Revitalization

Committee on Human Services Chair Nadeau, Community on Housing & Neighborhood Revitalization Chair Bonds, members of both Committees

My name is George Olivar. I am a proud member of the PFFC Downtown DC Public Restroom Initiative.

When we met with you, Council Member Nadeau, in November 2016 to share the findings of our research documenting the need for more clean, safe public restrooms in needed areas of DC we never dreamed that in April 2017 you would introduce Bill 22-0223, Public Restroom Facilities Installation and Promotion Act.

You believed in us. Bill 22-0223, incorporates what we learned from our research and is reflected in the guidelines included in the Bill.

But you didn't stop there. You played an important role in promoting the passage of this Bill which became Law 22-280 in April of 2019. In May of 2019 you sent funds from the Committee on Human Services (DHS) budget to the Department of General Service (DGS) and the Department of Small & Local Business Development (DSLBD) budgets to fully fund Law 22-280.

And your advice and encouragement along the way has been invaluable. Thanks to you and Council Member Robert White, the District's 2020 budget contains funding for two public restroom pilots which, while designed to increase access to public restrooms for everyone, in particular benefits people experiencing homelessness.

We are pleased to inform you that two amendments that we proposed for the Comprehensive Plan have been incorporated into the latest draft of the Plan:

- Action PROS 2.1.C: Parks Restroom Inventory. Conduct an assessment of the existing parks restroom inventory, considering park size and usage to determine the needs for additional public restrooms)

- Action UD- 2.1.D: Public Restrooms in Streetscapes. When designing and upgrading streets and sidewalks in commercial areas, investigate opportunities to install attractive, clean, safe standalone public restrooms that are accessible at all hours.

Until I got involved in PFFC's Downtown DC Public Restroom Initiative, I had no idea how people suffer when they don't have ready access to a clean, safe public restroom when nature calls. I have learned that ready access to a clean, safe public restroom for everyone is a human right; that it is fundamental to one's dignity; and that it is key for personal and public health.

I am particularly concerned with how people experiencing homelessness suffer because they can't find restrooms in the District when they need them. I have seen people experiencing homelessness turned away from using restrooms in restaurants and coffee shops. My heart goes out to individuals who sleep on the street and in parks at night as when nature they have no place to go. And if they are caught by a policeman defecating or urinating outside they face a fine of up to \$500, 90 days in jail or both which can have an adverse impact on their futures.

Law 22-280, which went into effect October 1, 2019, includes several statutory obligations that Mayor Bowser must take in order for implementation to take place. One is that the Mayor is, by November 15, 2019, is to have gone out to ANCs and BIDs to ask them if they would like to have a standalone public restroom open 24/7 installed within their boundaries. It is now January 29, 2 ½ months later, and this has not happened.

Another statutory obligation that Mayor Bowser has is, by May 1, 2020, to name the members of the Working Group charged with assessing the feasibility of and, if considered feasible, providing recommendations for the two public restroom pilots.

We are deeply concerned with the Mayor's delay in meeting her first statutory obligation. We are also concerned with possible future delays in meeting her statutory obligations.

We don't know what the Mayor thinks about increasing the number of clean, safe public restrooms in needed areas of DC. In the meantime, there are many individuals and organizations in the District who believe in the need for clean, safe public restrooms and are eagerly waiting for the Mayor to meet these statutory obligations in a timely fashion.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to testify.