

I'm here to support the creation of gender neutral bathrooms in state buildings because I know the importance of them as someone who has trouble with gendered spaces, and also because my partner and I fought to institute gender neutral bathrooms in every building of my high school. The fact that this is even a proposal at all is a very moving thing for me. When my art teacher, Travis Kline, proposed that I speak today my first thought was I couldn't believe I was lucky enough to live in a space where adults recognize this as a persistent and significant challenge. My second probably was about how much I hate public speaking. After the Queer and Allied Youth Summit last year in South Burlington, we brought a proposal for Gender Neutral bathrooms to our headmaster at Burr and Burton Academy. The collective group identified the creation of gender neutral bathrooms as one of the top goals for the year. Gender liberated bathrooms are one of the easiest and most important ways to create a safe space for trans* and gender nonconforming individuals. Often times, bathrooms are places in which trans* and gender nonconforming individuals face prejudice, discomfort, or even intimidation and violence. As a school lucky enough to have single stall bathrooms in every one of our buildings, we felt it was not only a statement we could make about inclusivity on our campus, but a change that could make a tangible difference for trans* students, gender nonconforming youth, and our queer community at large. We have a large amount of visitors, both adult and prospective students to Burr and Burton, and to see a gender neutral bathroom sign says that there is an active group of people thinking about the concerns and safety of others. It says you value presence of all individuals, regardless of their gender identity. It allowed us to start a conversation with our headmaster about diversity and acceptance in our community and it allowed us (and often challenged us) to do a lot of explaining. We know how hard it is to put into words their importance, but we also know the way it feels to see them. We know how it feels to have made a difference and I know how it feels to be in an environment that respects me as a person who simply needs to use the bathroom. By using a system of gender binaries to police who may and may not use the bathrooms, gendered bathrooms can be a really threatening place for the trans community and anybody whose gender presentation does not conform to expectation. Accessibility to gender neutral bathrooms not only provides a safe place, but also demonstrates that the attitude of the space is one of respect.