

On Apr 5, 2017, at 10:59 AM, Shay Totten wrote:

Dear Rep. Stevens (Tom),

I am writing to you as the parent of a 13-year-old transgender child who - regardless of their gender identity at the moment - is a child who has been challenged when using a public bathroom since they were around 5. That's when they identified as female, cut their hair short, pixie-like. People would often say, "Oh, little boy, you're in the wrong bathroom." This meant that when we were out in public my partner would have to accompany our child to the bathroom - even up to the age of 10 - otherwise they would refuse to use a public restroom (or be refused entry). With too few gender neutral options, we ran constant risks of urinary tract infections, discomfort and pain, and an unbelievable level of anxiety around going on trips, going out to eat, to see a Lake Monsters game, go skiing, school sporting events (they have been active in skiing, track, lacrosse, field hockey, soccer and more), and even using bathrooms at school.

At the young grade levels - Kindergarten and first grade - there were gender-free bathrooms in their classroom. So, there was never a question raised when they would go to the bathroom. That changed in the older grades, and now in middle school. While there are now gender neutral bathrooms at their middle school, they are often out-of-the-way and our child has to pass single-stall, gendered bathrooms to get to one of the two. While we're extremely thankful that the school administration has been supportive of our child, and other transgender children in the school, this means that outside of that building these kids are constantly challenged, which can lead to threats, feelings of "otherness" and being singled out. Not what ANY teenager needs let alone one who is being made to feel as if everyone is truly singling them out for being "different."

I know some of the members of this committee have said that such a bill is "silly" or not needed and a "waste of time" to discuss. All I can say is that the impact this legislation would have on the well-being of our family and our child would be extremely beneficial. And, this bill is only asking that existing, single-stall bathrooms be non-gendered. It doesn't seem like an onerous request or basic accommodation to make.

And, for those who think this is "silly" — I wonder if you could tell that to my 13-year-old's face, after a long day of not using a bathroom. Or, crying because they were challenged and had no one to speak up for them. Could you honestly tell a child who is fearful of bathrooms because they've been teased or harassed - by adults and peers mind you - that their fear is unjustified or unwarranted? Perhaps some of you could, but I would hope that after seeing the real pain and anguish and anxiety that my child, and hundreds of children (and adults) face daily with being challenged or questioned or feared for simply using a bathroom is real and deserves an adult response that is supportive, and guiding. As a parent, this constant anxiety and fear underlies an even more terrifying reality—that the suicide rates for transgender teens are the highest of any within the LGBTQ community.

So, yes, changing a bathroom sign seems silly. As in silly not to make it welcome for anyone, regardless of gender.

Thank you for your time, and if you have any further questions for us, please feel free to email.

Shay Totten

Jessica Kell

Burlington, VT