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April 11, 2017

The Honorable Helen Head, Chair  
House General, Housing & Military Affairs  
Vermont State House  
State Street  
Montpelier, Vermont

RE: H. 333, An Act Relating to Gender Free Bathrooms

Dear Chair Head and Members of the Committee:

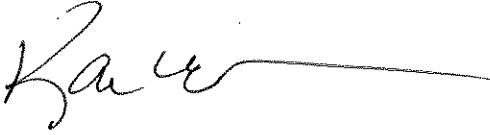
Thank you for the opportunity to speak with the Committee about this bill. My understanding is that the purpose of this bill is to increase access to bathrooms in places of public accommodation for transgender individuals by requiring that all single use bathrooms be available to anyone regardless of sex or gender identity.

Many single use facilities are designed to accommodate individuals with disabilities but are not for the exclusive use of those individuals. As a practical matter, there is no reason to have single use bathrooms designated as men's or women's rooms. The only "cost" to this bill would be the cost of changing signage to designate the bathroom as just an accessible (if it is) bathroom rather than a men's room or women's room.

Complaints could be filed with the Human Rights Commission alleging a violation of the public accommodations act in the event of non-compliance. The HRC would treat such complaints as "informal complaints," meaning that we would contact the entity, advise them of the law and ask for voluntary compliance, along with proof of compliance—such as photographs of the re-labeled doors. I do not expect this to be a drain on HRC resources or particularly difficult to enforce.

The benefit of this bill is that it will make more bathrooms available to everyone regardless of disability, sex or gender identity. For all of these reasons, we support the intent and purpose of the bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Karen", followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Karen L. Richards  
Executive Director