

**Testimony of Shelley Gregory, Strategic Project Coordinator, FORGE, Milwaukee, WI
Public Works Committee, November 13, 2019**

My name is Shelley Gregory. I am a resident of the City of Milwaukee and I am employed by FORGE, an organization that provides supports and services to transgender and non-binary individuals. We have been headquartered in Milwaukee since 1994, we are the largest transgender organization ~~and~~ in the state, and we are recognized as a leading transgender organization nationally.

I have worked closely with the City, providing technical assistance on matters affecting LGBTQ+ communities in the City for several years, and am presently doing so as a participant in the working group considering this matter.

Thank you to the committee for the opportunity to make a few remarks.

I will not repeat the data captured in the resolution's recitals. Reliable research, and the lived experiences of a broad range of individuals and families, provide a very clear picture of the challenges that many of us in this country face in exercising what has long been recognized internationally as a human right – the ability to access proper toileting facilities.

As someone who is transgender, I personally know first-hand the challenges of accessing public restrooms in this country and in this City. I am approaching middle age, and it was not until about a dozen years ago that I finally began using facilities designated for men, because I could no longer tolerate the stares, the verbal harassment and abuse, and the implicit threat that was inherent in every attempt I made to relieve myself in a public facility.

As a young person – and while in law school, no less – the final straw for me was entering a changing room in a department store in order to try on a sweater. A begin and regular act for most, I was, quite literally, persecuted by the gaggle of employees who gathered outside the changing room, speaking loudly for my benefit about the “him” or the “it” who was inside, emptying the changing room of any women present – informing them that a man had invaded the space – and summoning store security and the local police. I have anxiety today recounting that experience – the last time I ever entered a sex-segregated space demarcated for women.

My experience, unfortunately, is not atypical. My sense of self, of my value, my self-worth, my place in this society, my safety, and my ability to survive in public life were shaped for DECADES by my toileting needs.

Whether families with members of mixed genders – parents or guardians and their children – whether individuals using adaptive equipment or requiring a companion to assist with toileting needs – or whether someone like me, transgender or not, whose appearance does not conform closely to traditional ideas of what men and women are supposed to look like – there is NO reason that ANY one of us should ever find ourselves unable to relieve ourselves when required.

There is no downside to this resolution. It provides the opportunity to affirm the values of this City and its residents, to be a welcoming and supportive environment for all, and to enter the next decade well-positioned to compete in an economy and attract development opportunities as a City that values, respects, and affirms every person within its borders. It is an easy win symbolically and practically for the City and it has the power to CHANGE THE LIVES of a number of its employees and residents, moving this City ever, as our State motto confirms, Forward.

I thank the committee for its time and urge passage of the Resolution. Thank you.