

Inclusive Bathrooms



Gender and Sexuality Center

A Public Health Issue

For transgender and gender non-conforming people* using public bathrooms can be a source of stress and anxiety because of very real psychological and physical safety concerns. People whose appearance does not conform to what is commonly expected for men or women experience stares, questions, comments, verbal harassment, and physical violence when they try to use public bathrooms. Due to these possibilities, transgender and gender non-conforming people sometimes avoid using public bathrooms altogether, which has the potential for health complications, such as dehydration, urinary tract infections, kidney infections, and other kidney problems.



Recent legislation

In June 2016, the Chicago City Council approved measures to protect residents in accessing facilities on the basis of gender identity, aligning city measures with new guidelines recently enacted by Chicago Public Schools (CPS). These gender equality measures strengthen existing protections for residents under the city's Human Rights Ordinance. The gender equality amendment to Chicago's Human Rights Ordinance prohibits public accommodations like hotels, restaurants, grocery stores, etc. from requiring patrons to show a government-issued ID upon request to access facilities that are private in nature - such as bathrooms - based on a person's biological category, gender identity, or both.

These rights are also protected under the Illinois Human Rights Act, which prohibits discrimination against individuals based on sexual orientation, which means "actual or perceived heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, or gender-related identity, whether or not traditionally associated with the person's designated sex at birth." This covers the right to full and equal enjoyment of the facilities of any public place of accommodation, including schools. It is a civil rights violation if a business entity or school "fails to take corrective action to stop the severe or pervasive harassment" of an individual based on sexual orientation, which includes gender-related identity.

Taking Action

What can you do as an individual?

- Assume that people know which bathroom they are in and have chosen that bathroom.
- Allow people of any gender to use the bathroom without harassment or scrutiny. Waiting for an open stall, washing hands, using the mirror, etc. are not suspicious activities.
- Avoid staring. Avoid asking people if they are in the correct bathroom. Avoid creating or escalating a hostile environment.
- Interrupt hostile behavior in the bathroom. If you witness anyone being harassed, speak up and defend that person's rights or get help if needed.
- Talk with others about the challenges transgender and gender non-conforming people face in using public bathrooms and share ideas for making positive change.
- Be understanding if a transgender or gender non-conforming person does not feel safe using a gendered bathroom or locker room. Enter with them if possible or find another way to support.
- Consider how you can advocate for additional all gender/gender-inclusive bathrooms, signage, and policies wherever you go.
- Continue to educate yourself through articles, the work of relevant community organizations, and by observing the way gender expectations impact you and the people in your life.

Adapted from: [<http://www.basicrights.org/news/trans-justice-news/trans-and-gender-non-conforming-people-bathrooms-and-attacks-on-our-community>].

What can your workplace do?

- Provide training and clear expectations for all staff on gender and sexuality issues.
- Change single-stall bathrooms into all gender/gender-inclusive bathrooms.
- Use restroom signs that are inclusive. Some suggest using signage that demonstrates what is IN the restroom rather than WHO can use it (i.e. the image of a toilet)
- Have a policy requiring at least one all gender/gender-inclusive restroom in all newly constructed or significantly renovated buildings.
- Institute inclusive policies across the board and make the policies easily accessible online with contact information for further information or assistance.

About the UIC Gender and Sexuality Center:

The Gender and Sexuality Center at UIC creates a more inclusive campus and catalyzes positive social change by challenging heteronormativity and promoting deeply engaged and life affirming thinking, learning, and action. The Center works with people throughout the country and connects them with resources, referrals and opportunities.

**This document uses the terms "transgender" and "gender non-conforming" as umbrella terms to include anyone who does not identify with the gender associated with their sex assigned at birth or who presents in ways that do not correspond with societal expectations for the sex they were assigned at birth. People who fit this description may or may not identify with these terms.*

The image is borrowed from <http://bimagazine.org/index.php/news/issues-facing-bisexual-and-transgender-varient-people-arizonas-bathroom-bill/>

Contact: Megan Carney, Director, carneym@uic.edu / 312-413-9862 or visit us online: <https://genderandsexuality.uic.edu>