
THE CHICAGO RESTROOM ACCESS PROJECT'S

guide to peeing in peace

Explanations, examples, information, and resources to create a more safe and welcoming environment inside public restrooms.

designed for:

- businesses
- employers
- allies
- people with questions



Inside:

- The problem with public restrooms
- What Chicago law says
- Our suggested changes
- A guide to restroom activism
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- An infographic to share

Image by Carlos Salgado



the problem with public restrooms

Restrooms that are designated for only men or only women create problems sometimes. Transgender and gender non-conforming folks are often harassed, challenged, and even hurt while using public restrooms.

here's what some transgender people said about their restroom experiences:

"This young lady is accusing me of being male. Now, I see that I am transgender. I know that I'm transgender. I'm not trying to start a ruckus in here. I just need to use the bathroom."

"I feel like an animal or something. You know what I mean? "

"The black communities need to be more embracing towards the LGBT community because these are your cousins, your sons, your daughters, your nieces, your nephews, aunts, uncles, grandmas, grandfathers, whoever. These people are in all forms."

"I'm still your family, so y'all love me, so when you see another person out there who identify as me or different, but still under the spectrum, keep in mind that someone loves them as well."

"I just want to use the washroom like a regular person"

what does it mean to be transgender?

Transgender is an umbrella term for persons whose gender identity or expression is different from the sex they were assigned at birth.

gendered restrooms create problems for other people, too

- Dads who can't find a restroom with a diaper changing table
- Moms who want to keep their young sons with them, instead of sending them into a restroom of unfamiliar men
- People with disabilities who need assistance in the restroom, but have a caretaker of a different gender

how do we make restrooms safe and accessible for everyone?

We think single-stall restrooms (rooms with one toilet and one sink, that one person uses at a time) don't need a gender on the door.

Single-stall public restrooms can work just like they do at home. To make this change, you just need to change the sign on the restroom door.

wait, is this legal?

Yes.

According to a code memo issued by Commissioner Judith Frydland on Oct. 17, 2017, Chicago businesses have the option of designating each single-user restroom as unisex.

YES.

a quick and easy change

Changing the restroom signage is a cheap and easy solution that makes restrooms more accessible for everyone. We took a survey of over 800 people in Chicago, to ask which restroom sign they liked best. Here is what they chose:



And here are some other signage options we like, too:



We don't recommend any particular retailer, but these signs are available from many different stores on the internet. (Just google it!)

are people going to be ok with this change?

We think so!

We surveyed 130 Chicago business owners to ask them this question, and the results were overwhelmingly positive. 80% of the people we surveyed thought the restroom signage change would be "totally acceptable".

90% said they thought their customers would either approve of the all-gender restroom signs or not notice them at all.

Also, there are lots of successful Chicago businesses that already have all-gender restrooms. Places like Steppenwolf Theater Company, Floriole Cafe & Bakery, Lurie Children's Hospital, Sprout Social, and the Dill Pickle Food Coop, just to name a few.

i'm not trans. how will this change benefit me?

If you're a business owner, all-gender restrooms will make your business more welcoming to the LGBTQ community, individuals with healthcare assistants, and parents with young kids. It will also prevent conflicts about who is allowed to use the bathroom from happening in your place of business.

Also, Yelp! recently started listing businesses with all-gender restrooms on their website, so changing your signage may drum up new business.

If you're an employer, being proactive about providing all-gender restrooms is a good idea. Many states say it is an employer's legal responsibility to provide safe and comfortable restrooms for their transgender employees.

how can i advocate for accessible bathrooms at my favorite local businesses?

First of all, we suggest going in assuming that the people you're talking to have the best intentions. We have found that people are very open to making this kind of change, they just never realized it was something their employees or patrons wanted.

Here are the basic steps:

1. Find out who can make the change 2. Identify the barriers 3. Destroy the barriers

The first step is to figure out who to communicate with at the organization in question. Sometimes it's the owner or the facilities manager. If you are speaking to your employer, you may want to start with your HR department. You may get shuffled around from person to person, so be patient but persistent. You will probably need to try more than once.

Once you have identified the correct person, consider writing an email about your concern, or setting up a phone call or face-to-face meeting. Here is some suggested language for emailing your favorite businesses:

I noticed that [organization] has restrooms that are designated for men, and restrooms that are designated for women, but there are no unisex or family restroom options. In Chicago, it recently became legal for businesses to designate single-stall restrooms as all-gender/unisex/family. This has been helpful for people who sometimes struggle with restroom access, like transgender people, parents of young children of a different gender, and people with healthcare assistants. I think it would be a good change for [organization] to make and may make the business more welcoming to the LGBTQ population, and to local families.

You may want to share some of your own experiences using public restrooms, or some information about why the change is important to you.

how can i advocate for accessible bathrooms at my workplace?

Here is some suggested language for speaking to your employer about the change:

I'd like to talk about the restrooms here at [organization]. In Chicago, it recently became legal for businesses to designate single stall restrooms as all-gender/unisex/family. I think this is a change we may want to consider making at [organization]. I think making restrooms more accessible for employees and guests of the company who are transgender or genderqueer would be a positive step. It may also be a proactive step. In some other states, employers are required to provide gender-neutral restroom space, so tackling this change early may be wise. Additionally, in other states, some employers have been sued over the lack of gender-neutral facilities, so making a change may help us to avoid any such problem. There are prominent organizations in Chicago that have already successfully made this change, like Steppenwolf Theater, Northwestern University, and Sprout Social.

If you are comfortable, you may want to add information about your own restroom experiences, or why this change is important to you.

how about changing the laws to require single-stall restrooms to be all-gender?

Now that's a great idea! Many cities in the US have already taken that step, and we think Chicago should be next. We encourage you to contact your alderperson, city counselor, and the mayor to ask for that change.

anything else?

We hope you will join us in making the world a safer and friendlier place for transgender and gender non-conforming people. Talk to your friends and relatives about how difficult it can be for folks who struggle to find a place to safely relieve themselves. Let's spread empathy and compassion, and make it easier for everyone to pee in peace.

i have more questions

Questions are good. Here are some organizations that may be able to answer your questions:

Pride Action Tank
prideactiontank.org

Center on Halsted
3656 N Halsted St, Chicago, IL 60613
(773) 472-6469
www.centeronhalsted.org

Gender Spectrum
www.genderspectrum.org

Trans Lifeline
www.translifeline.org
(877) 565-8860

