

Dear Representatives,

Thank you for your consideration of Bill 474. This Bill is very important to me and could help countless numbers of people of all ages around the Commonwealth. Having lived in both Illinois and Ohio, I was horrified to learn that Ally's Law was not applicable in my home state of Virginia, where I was born and have now been living as a disabled adult for the past ten years. You get to rectify this by voting on Bill 474 today.

We don't often talk about our bathroom issues, it isn't polite, it embarrasses people. However, it's critical we start having those conversations.

I am about to be 42 years old and I have incontinence of the bladder and now bowel. I have been struggling with my bladder for over 15 years. My bladder is more elastic than the average person's because I have a connective tissue disorder called Ehlers Danlos Syndrome. It just doesn't hold. I rotate between "adult diapers" and pads and have a bedside toilet if needed. However, if I lose control of my bladder, no diaper on this planet is stopping it- the floor or my bed is.

I'd like to tell you a story that happened to me. A few years ago, when I was more mobile, I was shopping for groceries at the grocery store. Suddenly it hit. The all too familiar feeling of my bladder and I knew I couldn't make it to the bathroom. I made a decision. I figured with all the people around, if I kept my head up, and my eyes forward, no one would notice me peeing in the aisle, because no one really looks at each other anyways. So that's what I did and I peed all the way out the door. Luckily, no one noticed, or at least not until after I left and they probably blamed a poor innocent child.

That same year I was at a UPS where there are no public bathrooms and it happened again. I asked if I could use the bathroom and was told no. I said it was an emergency, still I was told no. I then said it was illegal for them to not let me use it. Luckily for me, the young employee did not know any better and let me go. Otherwise, what had happened in the grocery store would have happened on the floor of the UPS and there would have been no hiding.

I also have IBS, which causes me episodes of spontaneous, uncontrollable diarrhea. The instance urge is terrifying. I am ok with peeing down a grocery aisle, I can laugh about that- but to have diarrhea down the aisle?

Unfortunately, that is something I face every day. If I am lucky to be able to leave the house, half of the enjoyment is destroyed by the constant searching for a bathroom, the constant fear there will not be one.

Experiences like this, fighting for a right to pee or poop with dignity (and without the whole world knowing) make people not want to shop, go out in public, or travel. All for fear- Is there going to be somewhere I can go to the bathroom? That is a very real fear, for many. My father hasn't traveled to visit me in over a year for this very reason.

I look at books like "Everybody poops" and I laugh, but I also cry because it has become such an emotional issue for me.

Help myself and those that struggle like I do with their bladder and or bowel enjoy the freedoms of being in public again. Help take away some of that fear. Not everyone can tell their local UPS it is their right to pee; it is the law like I did- but that is why you represent us. You can tell these businesses. You can make it right; you have the power to make Virginia a place that stands for the rights of everyone and is a great place for those with disabilities to live. Everybody has a right to use the bathroom with dignity.

Thank you for your consideration,

Christina Brookman

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