

## The Council Should Fund Public Restrooms in the Budget

By Kate Coventry

The Council should find funding in the fiscal year (FY) 2020 budget for Act 22-0608, the Public Restroom Facilities Installation and Promotion Act. This act creates a working group to develop a two-pronged approach to promote restroom access: creating stand-alone restrooms and incentivizing businesses to allow the public to use their restrooms.

While many residents and visitors struggle with the lack of easy access to bathrooms, residents experiencing homelessness are particularly affected. Almost all shelters are closed during the day, so residents cannot access the restrooms there. And there is evidence that fewer businesses are allowing non-customers to use their restrooms: the [People for Fairness Coalition](#) visited 85 businesses to see if they would allow the general public, and particularly residents experiencing homelessness, to access their restrooms. In 2015, they found that 43, just over half of the businesses, allowed anyone to use their restroom. In spring 2017, they visited these businesses again and found that only 11 still allowed this access. Most residents experiencing homelessness do not have money to make purchases at these establishments.



The lack of access to bathrooms is not merely an inconvenience—it can have devastating health consequences. Dr. Catherine Crossland of Unity Healthcare [testified](#) last year about her patients skipping lifesaving blood pressure, heart and HIV/AIDS medications because they can lead to an urgent need for the restroom. The lack of public restrooms can also pose a public health risk: Southern California is experiencing the largest Hepatitis A outbreak since the 1990s because of the lack of toilets and handwashing facilities for residents experiencing homelessness. At least 20 people have died as a result.

The working group will work with local communities to identify sites for new standalone restrooms, like those in [Portland, Oregon](#), and will develop a program to incentivize businesses to make their restrooms available to the public. DCFPI encourages the Council to fund this act in the FY 2020 budget so that the working group can get started.

By increasing access to public restrooms, the District can be a friendlier place for tourists, children and their caretakers, residents with illnesses and disabilities, and residents experiencing homelessness.