

NEW COUNTY GENDER ID BILL PLAYS OUT IN WOMEN'S SHOWER ROOM AT SPORTS CLUB

Would new law apply to public health clubs?

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Montgomery County, MD - The safety and privacy rights of women were put in the crosshairs of the county's new transgender rights bill Monday when a male, wearing heavy female make-up, entered the women's shower and locker room.

The drama played out at the Rio Sport and Health Club in Gaithersburg, in the early afternoon. A transgender wearing heavy female makeup and a blue ruffled skirt entered the women's area - much to the shock of the handful of women members present, according to Mary Ann Andree, a club member who gave her account to a local news station, WJLA-TV.

The women immediately notified the club's staff, but the transgender member exited the area before the staff could react. One member said the incident was deeply disturbing to the women.

The club said that it has a unisex changing room and that their transgender members are welcome to use that facility. However, it will remain the club's policy to keep shower and locker room facilities segregated according to sex, according to Kelly Nicholson-Glover, general manager of the club. The club also claims that because it is a membership-only facility, it will not be covered by Montgomery County's new "Bill 2307, Non-Discrimination, Gender Identity." The bill adds 'gender identity' to the list of protected classes covered by Chapter 27 of the Montgomery County Code banning discrimination.

Bill 23-07 was passed by the County Council on November 13 and signed by the Ike Leggett, County Executive, on November 20. It prohibits discrimination against transgenders, cross-dressers, and transvestites in public housing, employment, public accommodations and their facilities.

The County Council frequently points out that the law excludes accommodations that are "distinctly private and personal" - implying that "distinctly private and personal" refers to bathrooms. "'Distinctly personal and private', in similar state statutes, is usually interpreted as referring to private clubs and associations, and not to bathrooms," according to Susan Jamison, a Poolesville attorney. In her opinion, the law is open to

undesirable interpretation which strongly threatens to put biologic males in female public restrooms and locker-rooms across the county. The bill will be clarified when access to women's bathrooms is challenged and a suit is brought before the County's Human Rights Commission - which is on record as saying it would interpret the bill as allowing a person to use the bathroom of his or her choice, based on that person's perceived 'gender identity'.

Maryland Citizens for a Responsible Government, a grassroots organization, is running a petition drive to have the bill put up for a referendum because it feels that it endangers women, normalizes abnormal behavior, and discriminates against the religious and moral beliefs of the majority of its citizens.

The group has put up a website, www.notmyshower.net, specifically to educate citizens about the bill. "Citizens should have the opportunity to vote on this," according to Michelle Turner, the group's spokeswoman. "It is becoming obvious that this bill will have very real and serious repercussions. Women cannot – and should not -- feel safe in public restrooms with this bill hanging over their heads."

Over 3,000 citizens have already signed the petition, according to Turner. The group is collecting signatures via their website, in front of grocery stores and at churches, synagogues, and mosques throughout the county. Over 25,000 valid signatures have to be collected by February 16th in order to put measure before voters next November.

www.notmyshower.net

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