Transgender and gender nonconforming individuals face disproportionately high levels of prejudice and discrimination in everyday life. These members of our community deserve the same dignity and respect as everyone else, in every area of life. This includes being afforded the dignity of equal access to public facilities in accordance with the gender they live every day.

Most people take unhindered access to restrooms and other sex-segregated facilities for granted. Unfortunately, this far from reality for many transgender and gender nonconforming people who often face stress and anxiety when accessing sex-segregated spaces like public restrooms. transgender and gender nonconforming individuals face an increased risk of violence. These risks and potential negative health consequences are exacerbated in the case of young nonconforming individuals, who are placed at risk of becoming victims of violence. These laws attempt to solve a problem that does not exist and is a consequence of misinformation and misunderstanding. Moreover, they harm the very residents city leaders are charged with protecting.

When people are prohibited from using the appropriate restroom, they may opt to not utilize the facility at all for fear of the very real possibility that they will be harassed or physically harmed. This in turn can lead to negative health outcomes. Additionally, as noted earlier, when transgender and gender nonconforming individuals are funneled into a sex-segregated space that does not align with their gender identity, they are placed at risk of becoming victims of violence. These risks and potential negative health consequences are exacerbated in the case of young people who cannot access facilities that align with the gender they live daily.

Some cities and state leaders have made the unjustifiable and discriminatory choice to enact laws that force residents to use facilities that do not align with their gender identity. These laws attempt to solve a problem that does not exist and is a consequence of misinformation and misunderstanding. Moreover, they harm the very residents city leaders are charged with protecting. When people are prohibited from using the appropriate restroom, they may opt to not utilize the facility at all for fear of the very real possibility that they will be harassed or physically harmed. This in turn can lead to negative health outcomes. Additionally, as noted earlier, when transgender and gender nonconforming individuals are funneled into a sex-segregated space that does not align with their gender identity, they are placed at risk of becoming victims of violence. These risks and potential negative health consequences are exacerbated in the case of young people who cannot access facilities that align with the gender they live daily.

For some people, their sex assigned at birth differs from their gender identity, or their innate sense of self as male, female, a blend of both, or neither. Additionally, some members of the LGBTQ community identify as gender nonconforming, meaning they express themselves in ways that do not follow traditional societal expectations of gender.

WHAT IS GENDER, GENDER IDENTITY, AND GENDER NONCONFORMING?

Gender refers to the characteristics and expectations society associates with being male or female. Gender, however, is not a simple binary of male or female. Rather, gender exists on a broad spectrum.

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WHAT CAN CITIES DO?

City officials should make the safety and wellbeing of transgender and gender nonconforming residents a top priority. Cities should enact comprehensive nondiscrimination ordinances that expressly cover sexual orientation and gender identity in employment, housing, and public accommodations. These ordinances should be free from any carve-outs that prohibit individuals from using facilities that accord with their gender identity. Further, city leaders should act swiftly to remove carve-outs allowing discrimination in restroom access where they exist.

Municipal officials can also implement administrative policies expressly protecting the right of residents and city employees to access facilities that align with who they are while on city property, accessing city services, and participating in city programs. In addition, city executives should issue rules designating all single-occupancy restrooms on city property as “all-gender.” Further, municipal legislators should extend this rule to all residents by passing an ordinance that requires all single-user sex-segregated facilities within city limits to be designated as all-gender.

CONCLUSION

The dignity harm caused by forcing residents to use facilities that do not accord with their gender identity cannot be overstated. What’s more, rules or ordinances that mandate or allow for this type of discrimination place already-vulnerable transgender and gender nonconforming people at an even greater risk of harassment, violence, and personal health problems. City leaders should not delay in carrying out their duty to protect the health, safety, and wellbeing of all residents by ensuring that everyone has equal access to sex-segregated facilities.