

TESTIMONY OF KATHRYN H. ANTHONY

BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

IN SUPPORT OF H.R. 4869

THE BIPARTISAN RESTROOM GENDER PARITY

IN FEDERAL BUILDINGS ACT

WASHINGTON, DC

MAY 12, 2010

Chairman Towns, Ranking Member Issa, members of the committee. Thank you so much for the invitation to appear before you today. It is an honor and one of the highlights of my professional career. I am the only female Full Professor in the School of Architecture at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where I have taught for 26 years. I have published widely on gender issues in design.

I applaud the committee for addressing an issue near and dear to my heart, and near and dear to the hearts and bladders of women and children all across the United States – one that is long overdue.

Ever since California led the way by passing the nation's first potty parity legislation, many states and municipalities across the country have passed similar laws and ordinances to provide equal speed of access for women and men to public restrooms. Yet today marks a milestone. It is the first time that this issue is addressed at the federal level. Congratulations!

I stand here today on behalf of your mothers, grandmothers, daughters, granddaughters, sisters, aunts, nieces, and countless female friends. No matter what our race, color, creed, age, size, shape, or political party—Democrat, Republican, Independent, or Green--we all share one frustrating experience. All too often we watch our male counterparts zip in and out of the restroom in a flash, while at the ladies' room, we are stuck waiting in long lines. And the men in our life have been stuck waiting for us. Why?

Much of our built environment—including that owned by the federal government-- was constructed in a different era, one where women were not as prevalent in the public realm and in the workforce as we are today. Until recently, most architects, contractors, engineers, building code officials, and clients were not concerned about this issue. They rarely contacted women about their restroom needs, women were rarely employed in these male-dominated professions, nor were they in a position to effect change. But, finally, now we are!

Why is this important? The average person uses a toilet about six to eight times a day, as many as 2,920 times per year. By age 80 we will have taken over 200,000 trips to the toilet and spent two years of our life in restrooms. No matter what our stature in life,

whether we are the President of the United States, the First Lady, or the homeless person on the street, we all use them.

We may laugh, and we may joke, but for millions of people around the world—boys and girls, men and women of all ages, especially pregnant and menstruating women--using the restroom is no laughing matter. Emergencies happen. Accidents happen. Urinary tract infections happen. Delaying voiding can result in serious medical conditions. Unsanitary, unsafe restrooms in our nation's schools force thousands of children to wait to use their bathroom at home, and "holding it in" can take its toll.

Forcing half the population to wait in line for restrooms is a subtle yet powerful form of gender discrimination. Public restrooms are just one of many instances where women and girls are disadvantaged by design, a topic I am writing about in my new book. Even in the US Capitol, until recently, Congresswomen and women Senators were forced to use restrooms far away from the House and Senate floors, causing some to miss important votes.

Public restrooms are a fundamental part of our nation's infrastructure, just as important as our roads and bridges. Taking care of our bodies is just as important as taking care of our cars. Public restrooms are a health and safety issue. In this respect we lag far behind countries like Japan where clean, safe, available restrooms are integral parts of the urban landscape. If it were up to me, constructing cutting-edge, well-designed, safe 21st century public restrooms should be part of another national stimulus package. They make downtowns more user friendly. They encourage walking and help combat obesity. It would be money well spent.

In an ideal world, I would call for even greater numbers of women's to men's fixtures, as is already the case in many states and municipalities with ratios of 2:1, 3:1 or even 4:1. Such ratios are most needed when large groups of people amass all at once, such as when a court session adjourns, or when a group of school children visit. In an ideal world, I would call for mandatory retrofits to all existing buildings, not just renovations and new construction. Just as millions of persons with disabilities benefit every day from the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), millions of women and children would benefit every day from even greater potty parity laws.

But as a realist, I believe that this Act paves the way for future changes that could have just as sweeping impacts as the ADA.

It is now time for our federal government to act. Today's proposed legislation is a small but significant step in the right direction, an achievement worth celebrating, one that you can all be proud of. It will have a positive impact on millions of women and children across the USA—and on the men who wait for them.

That's one small step for Congress, one giant leap for humankind.

Thank you.