

For immediate release: Thursday, March 18, 2010

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Chairman Towns Introduces Restroom Gender Parity in Federal Buildings Act

Bill to provide equal access to public restrooms for men and women

WASHINGTON – House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform Chairman Edolphus “Ed” Towns (D-NY) this week introduced H.R. 4869, the Restroom Gender Parity in Federal Buildings Act (also referenced as the “Potty Parity Act”), to address the problem of insufficient restroom facilities for women in federal buildings. The bipartisan measure, cosponsored by Ranking Member Darrell Issa (R-CA) and Reps. Pete Visclosky (D-IN) and Yvette Clarke (D-NY), would require any federal building constructed for public use to have a 1 to 1 ratio for toilets, including urinals, in women’s and men’s restrooms. The bill would also impact future federal projects by mandating that preference for federal leasing considerations be given to buildings that meet this criterion.

Chairman Towns, who introduced similar legislation in the 110th Congress, expressed concern that “exasperating lines” and overall restroom accommodations for women were “an inconvenience seen in almost every type of public building.” With many public establishments constructed decades ago when fewer women travelled and worked outside the home, public restrooms are one of the few public domains still largely segregated by gender.

“Our nation’s history shows that the structure and accessibility of American public restrooms have served as manifestations of more deeply rooted problems of discrimination, among race, physical ability and gender,” said Chairman Towns. “In 2010, we must move the clock forward by finally addressing an overdue problem of unequal, inadequate and inaccessible public restrooms for women.”

Due to biological and social distinctions, women often need to allow for more time than men in restrooms, and limited restrooms impose undue hardship on women, especially those who are pregnant or suffer from other medical conditions. When the restroom accommodations are

unequal or inadequate, this issue is especially problematic for women in careers, where they are underrepresented, like law enforcement or construction. In the worst cases, some have suffered work-related problems and terminations as a result of such controversies.

The Restroom Gender Parity in Federal Buildings Act sets a strict standard in its revision of federal building codes with regard to the accessibility of restroom accommodations for men and women.

Chairman Towns concluded, “As the number of women in all sectors of employment and facets of American life continue to grow exponentially, the Potty Parity Act is necessary not only for the advancement of gender parity, but also to ensure the general well being and health care of women in our society.”

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