Planned Parenthood of New York City
Testimony on Gender-neutral single-occupancy restrooms (*Int 0871-2015*)
January 14, 2015

Good afternoon. I am Julienne Verdi, Director of Government Relations at Planned Parenthood of New York City (PPNYC). I am pleased to provide testimony on the New York City Council’s effort to change the current requirements for single occupancy restrooms. Planned Parenthood of New York City thanks the Honorable Council Member Daniel Dromm for introducing this legislation, the Honorable Council Member Jumaane D. Williams, Chair of the Committee on Housing and Buildings for his leadership in convening this hearing, and the entire City Council for their dedication to this issue.

Planned Parenthood of New York City serves more than 50,000 patients annually in our five health centers located in all five boroughs. We offer reproductive and sexual health care services and health insurance screening to clients of all genders and have taken steps to make our medical office practices inclusive of all New Yorkers. We pride ourselves on the medically accurate, high quality, confidential care we provide to all people, no matter what, and we look forward to continuing to grow our health services for transgender New Yorkers in the coming years.

As a leading sexual and reproductive health care provider in New York City, we operate under the principle that basic health care should enable individuals to lead their lives in the manner that is healthiest and safest for them, and that all people, no matter their gender or gender identity, should have the means to feel secure and thrive in their everyday lives. As part of our ongoing efforts to make our services more accessible for our patients and our offices more welcoming for our employees, PPNYC changed its single stall bathrooms in 2012 to be gender neutral. Single occupancy restroom signs now read "All genders" and do not have a visual icon denoting a specific gender.

An estimated 25,000 transgender individuals live in New York City.\(^1\) Transgender New Yorkers often face discrimination, lack of insurance coverage, provider insensitivity, and lack of awareness of available resources that prevent them from receiving the services they need. Transgender New Yorkers are at significantly higher risk of facing violence or being denied employment than cisgender New Yorkers, and many have faced such serious workplace discrimination because of their gender identity, they were forced to quit.\(^2\) It is clear that more must be done to create inclusive environments where transgender and gender non-conforming

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(TGNC) New Yorkers are not subject to harassment and are further stigmatized for being who they are.

Int 0871-2015 would address issues of discrimination in public accommodation and have an immediate positive impact on the lives of many New Yorkers. The proposed legislation would require all single-occupant bathrooms to be made available to persons of any gender, providing greater protections for transgender and gender non-conforming communities and helping to ease serious health and safety concerns. Intro. 871 would also amend the city's plumbing and building codes to remove outdated regulations that would continue to restrict certain building owners from designating gender-neutral bathrooms.

When someone is denied access to facilities, or subjected to verbal or physical assault for attempting to use a public restroom, it is significantly harder for that person to lead a safe and healthy life. In particular, transgender people of color and those who have not medically transitioned experience disproportionately higher risks of violence when attempting to access bathroom facilities. These risks often lead TGNC individuals to avoid using public restrooms altogether, which has been shown to lead to adverse health effects such as dehydration, kidney infections, and urinary tract infections. As a safety net provider, we know how critical access and availability are to equitable healthcare and improved health outcomes. As such, we strongly support measures that explicitly protect transgender and gender-nonconforming people in restrooms and help to build more inclusive communities.

New York City has long been a leader in advancing the rights of LGBTQ people and we urge the Council to pass the proposed legislation to further strengthen protections for LGBTQ New Yorkers. The city’s Human Rights Law guarantees protections for TGNC New Yorkers when it comes to housing, credit, public accommodation, schools, and employment, and we proudly applaud the de Blasio administration's recent report outlining how the administration intends to interpret the Human Rights Law to better protect transgender and gender non-conforming New Yorkers. While the report issued by the New York City Commission on Human Rights will advance many of the goals of Intro. 871, enacting this bill into law is needed to codify the Commission’s report and ensure appropriate implementation is achieved. Intro 871 will bring the city's codes in line with the law, closing potential loopholes and guaranteeing the policy cannot be easily overturned under a new administration.

As a leader of progressive policies, New York City has a responsibility to stand with other U.S. cities in pushing back against discriminatory policies and passing legislation to support the safety

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of transgender communities. Washington D.C., Philadelphia, Austin, and West Hollywood have all enacted laws requiring safe access to restrooms for all genders and mandating single-occupancy bathrooms be made gender-neutral. To help ensure the intent of the law is upheld and enforced, we recommend the City create a clear implementation and enforcement plan. Learning from the lessons of Washington D.C., which experienced high rates of noncompliance for several years, we propose New York City put in place a public campaign with downloadable tools for recommended restroom signage and specific measures to hold restroom owners accountable for noncompliance.

This legislation comes at a critical time when many state legislatures are working to enact discriminatory policies that target transgender and gender non-conforming communities. Restrooms have long been battlegrounds for issues of gender equity and civil rights. Spaces of public accommodation, and bathrooms in particular, have repeatedly been used to argue against civil liberties under the guise of 'security' and protection against sexual predators. In 1983, the Equal Rights Amendment was defeated after members of Congress argued that its passage would lead to the creation of unisex bathrooms and endanger women's safety. Arizona, Texas, Florida and Kentucky have all recently introduced measures to restrict access to public restrooms for transgender individuals, and in November 2015, Houston voters struck down an equal rights bill known as HERO, after advocates campaigned on the slogan, “no men in the women’s bathrooms.” Intro. 871 is urgently needed to advance equal access to public accommodation and help build safer communities for all New Yorkers.

We applaud the City Council’s commitment to strengthening the rights of transgender New Yorkers and urge the Council to pass Proposed Int. No 871. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important issue.

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Since 1916, Planned Parenthood of New York City (PPNYC) has been an advocate for and provider of reproductive health services and education for New Yorkers. Through a threefold mission of clinical services, education, and advocacy, PPNYC is bringing better health and more fulfilling lives to each new generation of New Yorkers. As a voice for sexual and reproductive health equity, PPNYC supports legislation and policies to ensure that all New Yorkers—and, in fact, people around the world—will have access to the full range of reproductive health care services and information.

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