



Seattle Women's Commission

January 28, 2016

RE: Opposition to HB 2589

Dear Representative Hunter,

The Seattle Women's Commission is a non-partisan body of 20 representatives appointed by the Mayor and Seattle City Council to provide expertise on issues affecting women and girls. We are not an advocacy organization, rather, our mission is to provide unbiased assessment and expert advice on women's issues.

We are writing to you to express our opposition, in the strongest of terms, against HB 2589.

We believe that it is important to provide clarity on this important issue. It has come to our attention that there is considerable disagreement concerning the issue of public accommodation (i.e. bathroom and locker room) usage by members of the transgender community.

We take this issue seriously for two primary reasons: (1) A large portion of our work concerns violence against women, including sexual assault and harassment, which has been voiced as a concern related to HB 2587 and (2) Transgender women are women, meaning that this community's concerns are integral to our work as a Commission.

We understand that concerns have been raised by women in Washington State that they fear a greater risk to their safety and wellbeing by allowing members of the transgender community to use the bathroom or locker room that they identify with. Many of our Commissioners, including our Co-Chair Jaron Goddard, are survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault, and so again, we reiterate that we do not take these concerns lightly.

After a careful review, we have determined that there is next to zero evidence of attacks, voyeurism, and other illegal activity documented of men posing as transgender women, or in other words, men taking advantage of preexisting laws that allow transgender individuals to use the bathroom or locker room they identify with.

Beyond this, Washington State already makes harassment and voyeurism illegal in public spaces (see RCW 9a.46.020 and RCW 9A.44.115). Simply put, if anyone feels they are being harassed or a victim of voyeurism in a place with a “reasonable expectation of privacy,” like a bathroom or locker room, this act is categorized as a Class C felony. Men are not allowed to enter a women’s restroom with the intent of causing harm, period.

We have reviewed HB 2587 in detail and conclude that it would force transgender individuals to use places of public accommodations that they do not identify with. We conclude that this poses an undue risk to their safety, as the Department of Justice has determined that half of all transgender people are victims of sexual assault in their lifetimes.¹ As you are well aware, sexual assault is committed predominantly by men against women, and we strongly believe that if transgender women are forced to use men’s bathrooms, this would put them at serious risk.

In closing, please know that we have evaluated this issue in depth, and took our time to reach this conclusion. We hope you receive our message with an open mind and heart. This issue is charged with a great deal of emotion, and so our intention as a non-partisan Commission is to provide clarity on this important issue.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to us with any questions.

Sincerely,



Jaron Reed Goddard, Co-Chair
Seattle Women’s Commission

Liz Kellogg, Co-Chair
Seattle Women’s Commission

cc: Patty Lally, Director, Seattle Office for Civil Rights

¹ http://www.ovc.gov/pubs/forge/sexual_numbers.html

