

# Best Practices

## A Guide to Restroom Access for Transgender Workers

**Core principle:** All employees, including transgender employees, should have access to restrooms that correspond to their gender identity.

### Introduction

The Department of Labor’s (DOL) Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requires that all employers under its jurisdiction provide employees with sanitary and available toilet facilities, so that employees will not suffer the adverse health effects that can result if toilets are not available when employees need them. This publication provides guidance to employers on best practices regarding restroom access for transgender workers. OSHA’s goal is to assure that employers provide a safe and healthy working environment for *all* employees.

### Understanding Gender Identity

In many workplaces, separate restroom and other facilities are provided for men and women. In some cases, questions can arise in the workplace about which facilities certain employees should use. According to the Williams Institute at the University of California-Los Angeles, an estimated 700,000 adults in the United States are *transgender*—meaning their internal *gender identity* is different from the sex they were assigned at birth (e.g., the sex listed on their birth certificate). For example, a *transgender man* may have been assigned female at birth and raised as a girl, but identify as a man. Many transgender people *transition* to live their everyday life as the gender they identify with. Thus, a transgender man may transition from living as a woman to living as a man. Similarly, a *transgender woman* may be assigned male at birth, but transition to living as a woman consistent with her gender identity. Transitioning is a different process for

everyone—it may involve social changes (such as going by a new first name), medical steps, and changing identification documents.

### Why Restroom Access Is a Health and Safety Matter

Gender identity is an intrinsic part of each person’s identity and everyday life. Accordingly, authorities on gender issues counsel that it is essential for employees to be able to work in a manner consistent with how they live the rest of their daily lives, based on their gender identity. Restricting employees to using only restrooms that are not consistent with their gender identity, or segregating them from other workers by requiring them to use gender-neutral or other specific restrooms, singles those employees out and may make them fear for their physical safety. Bathroom restrictions can result in employees avoiding using restrooms entirely while at work, which can lead to potentially serious physical injury or illness.

### OSHA’s Sanitation Standard

Under OSHA’s [Sanitation standard](#) (1910.141), employers are required to provide their employees with toilet facilities. This standard is intended to protect employees from the health effects created when toilets are not available. Such adverse effects include urinary tract infections and bowel and bladder problems. OSHA has consistently interpreted this standard to require employers to allow employees prompt access to sanitary facilities. Further, employers may not impose unreasonable restrictions on employee use of toilet facilities.

## Model Practices for Restroom Access for Transgender Employees

Many companies have implemented written policies to ensure that *all* employees—including transgender employees—have prompt access to appropriate sanitary facilities. The core belief underlying these policies is that all employees should be permitted to use the facilities that correspond with their gender identity. For example, a person who identifies as a man should be permitted to use men’s restrooms, and a person who identifies as a woman should be permitted to use women’s restrooms. The employee should determine the most appropriate and safest option for him- or herself.

The best policies also provide additional options, which employees may choose, but are not required, to use. These include:

- Single-occupancy gender-neutral (unisex) facilities; and
- Use of multiple-occupant, gender-neutral restroom facilities with lockable single occupant stalls.

Regardless of the physical layout of a worksite, all employers need to find solutions that are safe and convenient and respect transgender employees.

Under these best practices, employees are not asked to provide any medical or legal documentation of their gender identity in order to have access to gender-appropriate facilities. In addition, no employee should be required to use a segregated facility apart from other employees because of their gender identity or transgender status. Under OSHA standards, employees generally may not be limited to using facilities that are an unreasonable distance or travel time from the employee’s worksite.

## Other Federal, State and Local Laws

Employers should be aware of specific laws, rules, or regulations regarding restroom access in their states and/or municipalities, as well as the potential application of federal anti-discrimination laws.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), the Department of Justice (DOJ), DOL, and several other federal agencies, following

several court rulings, have interpreted prohibitions on sex discrimination, including those contained in Title VII of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*, to prohibit employment discrimination based on gender identity or transgender status. In April 2015, the DOL’s Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) announced it would require federal contractors subject to Executive Order 11246, as amended, which prohibits discrimination based on both sex and gender identity, to allow transgender employees to use the restrooms and other facilities consistent with their gender identity. Also in April 2015, the EEOC ruled that a transgender employee cannot be denied access to the common restrooms used by other employees of the same gender identity, regardless of whether that employee has had any medical procedure or whether other employees’ may have negative reactions to allowing the employee to do so. The EEOC held that such a denial of access constituted direct evidence of sex discrimination under Title VII.

The following is a sample of state and local legal provisions, all reaffirming the core principle that employees should be allowed to use the restrooms that correspond to their gender identity.

**Colorado:** Rule 81.9 of the Colorado regulations requires that employers permit their employees to use restrooms appropriate to their gender identity rather than their assigned gender at birth without being harassed or questioned. 3 CCR 708-1-81.9 (revised December 15, 2014), available at <http://cdn.colorado.gov/cs/Satellite/DORA-DCR/CBON/DORA/1251629367483>.

For more information refer to: “Sexual Orientation & Transgender Status Discrimination—Employment, Housing & Public Accommodations,” Colorado Civil Rights Division, available at: <http://cdn.colorado.gov/cs/Satellite/DORA-DCR/CBON/DORA/1251631542607>.

**Delaware:** Guidance from the Delaware Department of Human Resource Management provides Delaware state employees with access to restrooms that correspond to their gender identity. The guidance was issued pursuant to the state’s gender identity nondiscrimination law.

Delaware’s policy also suggests: Whenever practical, a single stall or gender-neutral restroom may be provided, which all employees may utilize.

However, a transgender employee will not be compelled to use only a specific restroom unless all other co-workers of the same gender identity are compelled to use only that same restroom.

For more information refer to: State of Delaware Guidelines on Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action Gender Identity, available at: <http://www.delawarepersonnel.com/policies/documents/sod-eeoc-guide.pdf>.

**District of Columbia:** Rule 4-802 of the D.C. Municipal Regulations prohibits discriminatory practices in regard to restroom access. Individuals have the right to use facilities consistent with their gender identity. In addition, single-stall restrooms must have gender-neutral signage. D.C. Municipal Regulations 4-802, "Restrooms and Other Gender Specific Facilities," available at: <http://www.dcregs.dc.gov/Gateway/RuleHome.aspx?RuleNumber=4-802>.

**Iowa:** The Iowa Civil Rights Commission requires that employers allow employees access to restrooms in accordance with their gender identity, rather than their assigned sex at birth.

For more information refer to: "Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity – An Employer's Guide to Iowa Law Compliance," Iowa Civil Rights Commission, available at: [https://icrc.iowa.gov/sites/files/civil\\_rights/publications/2012/SOGIEmpl.pdf](https://icrc.iowa.gov/sites/files/civil_rights/publications/2012/SOGIEmpl.pdf).

**Vermont:** The Vermont Human Rights Commission requires that employers permit employees to access bathrooms in accordance with their gender identity.

For more information refer to: "Sex, Sexual Orientation, and Gender Identity: A Guide to Vermont's Anti-Discrimination Law for Employers and Employees," Vermont Human Rights Commission, available at: <http://hrc.vermont.gov/sites/hrc/files/pdfs/other%20reports/trans%20employment%20brochure%207-13-12.pdf>.

**Washington:** The Washington State Human Rights Commission requires employers that maintain gender-specific restrooms to permit transgender employees to use the restroom that

is consistent with their gender identity. Where single occupancy restrooms are available, the Commission recommends that they be designated as "gender neutral."

For more information refer to: "Guide to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and the Washington State Law Against Discrimination," available at: <http://www.hum.wa.gov/Documents/Guidance/GuideSO20140703.pdf>.

## Additional Information

- American Psychological Association. Answers to your questions about transgender people, gender identity and gender expression, 2011: <http://www.apa.org/topics/lgbt/transgender.aspx>.
- Transgender Law Center's model employer policy, with an extensive section on restrooms, can be found at: <http://transgenderlawcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/model-workplace-employment-policy-Updated.pdf>.
- "Restroom Access for Transgender Employees" on Human Rights Campaign website: <http://www.hrc.org/resources/entry/restroom-access-for-transgender-employees>.
- National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and the National Center for Transgender Equality. National Transgender Discrimination Survey, 2011: <http://endtransdiscrimination.org/report.html>.

## How OSHA Can Help

OSHA has a great deal of information to assist employers in complying with their responsibilities under the law. Information on OSHA requirements and additional health and safety information, including information on OSHA's Sanitation standard, is available on the agency's website ([www.osha.gov](http://www.osha.gov)).

Workers have a right to a safe workplace ([www.osha.gov/workers.html#2](http://www.osha.gov/workers.html#2)). The law requires employers to provide their employees with working conditions that are free of known dangers. An employer's duty to provide a safe workplace includes the duty to provide employees with toilet facilities that are sanitary and available, so that employees can use them when they need to do so. Employers also have a duty to protect all

their employees, regardless of whether they are transgender, from any act or threat of physical violence, harassment, intimidation, or other threatening disruptive behavior that occurs at the work site. For more information on workplace violence, please see OSHA's website at: [www.osha.gov/SLTC/workplaceviolence](http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/workplaceviolence).

Workers who believe that they have been exposed to a hazard or who just have a question should contact OSHA. For example, workers may file a complaint to have OSHA inspect their workplace if they believe that their workplace is unsafe or that their employer is not following OSHA standards. Just contact OSHA at: 1-800-321-OSHA (6742), or visit [www.osha.gov](http://www.osha.gov). Complaints that are signed by an employee are more likely to result in an on-site inspection. It's confidential. We can help.

The *Occupational Safety and Health Act* (OSH Act) prohibits employers from retaliating against their employees for exercising their rights under the OSH Act. These rights include raising a workplace health and safety concern with the employer, reporting an injury or illness, filing an OSHA complaint, and participating in an inspection or talking to an inspector. If workers have been retaliated against for exercising their rights, they must file a complaint with OSHA within 30 days of the alleged adverse action. For more information, please visit [www.whistleblowers.gov](http://www.whistleblowers.gov).

OSHA can also help answer questions or concerns from employers. To reach your closest OSHA regional or area office, go to OSHA's Regional and Area Offices webpage ([www.osha.gov/html/RAmap.html](http://www.osha.gov/html/RAmap.html)) or call 1-800-321-OSHA (6742). OSHA also provides free, confidential on-site assistance and advice to small and medium-sized employers in all states across

the country, with priority given to high-hazard worksites. On-site Consultation services are separate from enforcement activities and do not result in penalties or citations. To contact OSHA's free consultation program, or for additional compliance assistance, call OSHA at 1-800-321-OSHA (6742).

## References:

*Department of Labor, Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs, 2015. "Frequently Asked Questions EO 13672 Final Rule", available at: [http://www.dol.gov/ofccp/lgbt/lgbt\\_faqs.html#Q35](http://www.dol.gov/ofccp/lgbt/lgbt_faqs.html#Q35).*

*National Center for Transgender Equality and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2011 at 56 (noting that only 22% of transgender people have been denied access to gender-appropriate restrooms), available at: <http://endtransdiscrimination.org/report.html>.*

*Gates, Gary J., How many people are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender? Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law, 2011. Retrieved 5/18/2015 from: <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Gates-How-Many-People-LGBT-Apr-2011.pdf>.*

*Grant, Jaime M., Lisa A. Mottet, Justin Tanis, Jack Harrison, Jody L. Herman, and Mara Keisling. Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey. Washington: National Center for Transgender Equality and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2011 at 56 (noting that only 22% of transgender people have been denied access to gender-appropriate restrooms), available at: <http://endtransdiscrimination.org/report.html>.*

*Lusardi v. McHugh, EEOC Appeal No. 0120133395 (Apr. 1, 2015), available at: <http://transgenderlawcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/EEOC-Lusardi-Decision.pdf>.*

*Macy v. Holder, EEOC Appeal No. 0120120821 (2012); Attorney General Memorandum, Treatment of Transgender Employment Discrimination Claims (Dec. 15, 2015). Retrieved 5/18/2015 from: [http://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/opa/press-releases/attachments/2014/12/18/title\\_vii\\_memo.pdf](http://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/opa/press-releases/attachments/2014/12/18/title_vii_memo.pdf).*

*Memorandum to Regional Administrators and State Designees of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration on the Interpretation of 29 CFR 1910.141(c) (1)(i): Toilet Facilities (Apr. 6, 1998), available at: [www.osha.gov/pls/oshaweb/owadisp.show\\_document?p\\_table=INTERPRETATIONS&p\\_id=22932](http://www.osha.gov/pls/oshaweb/owadisp.show_document?p_table=INTERPRETATIONS&p_id=22932).*

**Disclaimer:** This document is not a standard or regulation, and it creates no new legal obligations. It contains recommendations as well as descriptions of mandatory safety and health standards. The recommendations are advisory in nature, informational in content, and are intended to assist employers in providing a safe and healthful workplace. The *Occupational Safety and Health Act* requires employers to comply with safety and health standards and regulations promulgated by OSHA or by a state with an OSHA-approved state plan. In addition, the Act's General Duty Clause, Section 5(a)(1), requires employers to provide their employees with a workplace free from recognized hazards likely to cause death or serious physical harm.



U.S. Department of Labor



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