

Senator Curry, Representative Roberts, and Distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement, and Business, My name is Riley Nelson, and I live in Pittsfield Maine. I am currently a senior at Maine Central Institute. I am testifying in support of LD-93, An Act to Ensure Access for All Caregivers to Diaper Changing Stations in Public Restrooms.

As many of you may already know, before this bill came before you, it was a bill for our model state government program, Youth and Government. I stand here before you as the source from whence this proposal came, and I hope to adequately express why we must pass this bill, for true equality in our beautiful state.

I want to be a father one day. In order to be a good one, there is a different set of standards to follow than there may have been years ago. Our society is moving towards more profound equality, and childcare responsibility is appropriately no longer placed solely on women. And yet, when I go into public, I rarely see a changing station in the men's restrooms.

I often wonder why this is, as Maine has always been a leader in equality. We were among the first ten states to legalize and protect same-sex marriage, and yet we are not proving that we protect the rights of Maine State citizens to love, marry, and adopt as they wish. The lack of equal access to changing stations is a barrier that can hinder or completely prevent LGBTQ+ members, namely gay couples, from being able to adopt a child and provide a much-needed loving home. This is a barrier we can remove, and there is little reason to remain complacent.

In order to continue our state's long-standing history of revolutionary equal rights protections, it is essential that we require the provision of accessible baby changing stations to everyone, regardless of gender, and by doing so facilitate progress in our society. This means providing parents, especially fathers no matter their relationship status, the ability to care for their own children, and removing the limitations and burdens of relying solely on changing stations in women's and family restrooms.

Because of the current disparity, parents are often forced to change their children's diapers in unsafe and unclean environments, such as cars or store shelves. Providing changing stations is not only about removing barriers for parents. It is primarily about the health and safety of children.

Distinguished members of the committee before me, I urge you to support LD-93. It is essential that all caregivers are ensured the resources that allow them to care for their children in public spaces, without facing unnecessary obstacles. This piece of legislation will do exactly this, while also promoting equality, inclusivity, and cleanliness. This is an important way in which we can contribute to leveling the unfair and unsafe playing field partners and parents face today, and ensure the safety and health of our state's children.

I ask those of you who are parents to think about how this would have made your life easier, safer, and cleaner, and I implore you to support this bill to provide this aid to future generations. To people like me, who hope to be the best fathers they can be.

Thank you.