

Inclusive Bathroom Signage Recommendations

By the Rainbow Alliance Inclusion Network
Best Practices Subcommittee

State Human Resources
Office of Financial Management
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Washington State Employees'
LGBTQ+ Business Resource Group



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Executive summary

This document produced by the Best Practices Group, a subcommittee of the Rainbow Alliance Inclusion Network, or RAIN, explores the role of updating restroom signage in promoting gender inclusivity in the workplace. While some state agencies have created gender-affirming restroom signs and gender nonrestrictive single-stall restrooms, many have not. This document is meant to assist state agencies considering new bathroom signage in making their own improvements by explaining why agencies have made this change, the challenges agency leaders faced in adopting the new signage and how each agency ultimately overcame those challenges.

The full document also includes individual testimonials from LGBTQ+ state employees and the personal impact that inclusive restroom signs have had on their ability to show up authentically at work.

Taken together, this information offers agency leaders a clearer view of how important a simple change like updating restroom signage can be and a framework for leading their agency through signage changes.

Background

Nationally, polling data collected by Gallup shows there has been a steady increase in the percentage of U.S. adults who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT¹) from 3.5% in 2012 to 4.5% in 2017.²

The Pacific region of the United States saw the greatest increase in LGBT identification, from 4.2% in 2012–13 to 4.9% percent in 2015–16.

And in Washington, Gallup polling shows that 4.6% of adults identified as LGBT in 2015–16.³

The 2015 National Transgender Survey found that 23% of trans people in Washington state who had held a job in the previous year reported being mistreated at work based on their gender identity or gender expression. This mistreatment included employees being forced to use a restroom that did not align with their gender identity.⁴

Despite [Washington Administrative Code 162-32-060](#) that states that all covered entities “cannot require use [of restrooms] inconsistent with gender expression or gender identity,” misinformation and mistreatment persist. The use of gender-inclusive and gender-affirming signage on agency restrooms not only affirms compliance with this law, but allows agencies to reaffirm their commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion and respect.

¹ LGBTQ+ is an acronym used for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer. The plus sign is used to include individuals who are not listed (pansexual, agender, bigender, two-spirit, etc.) While there are other forms of this term in use, this report uses LGBTQ+ without intending to exclude any individuals.

² Frank Newport. (2018). [In U.S., Estimate of LGBT Population Rises to 4.5%](#) Gallup website.

³ Gary J. Gates. (2017). [Vermont Leads State in LGBT Identification](#) Gallup website.

⁴ [2015 National Transgender Survey](#).



Recommendations

Based on our research, communication with agency leaders and testimonial accounts from transgender and non-binary state employees, we recommend that all state agencies take the following steps:

- Develop change management plans
- Make single stall restrooms and showers gender nonrestrictive.
- Add gender-affirming signage to segregated bathrooms that state people are welcome to use the restroom that best aligns with their gender identity.⁵ This is consistent with [WAC 162-32-060](#) and [RCW 49.60](#).
- Include gender nonrestrictive restroom facilities in all new construction. In cases of remodels, conversion to nonrestrictive restroom facilities, whenever possible, is recommended.

When considering the transition of restroom signs to gender-inclusive signage, we recommend equipping agency leaders, managers and supervisors with as much information as possible at the start of the process. This includes arming leaders with educational materials, answers to frequently asked questions and identifying where employees can go outside the agency for assistance. In this way, staff feel and see that they have supportive leaders who can walk them through these changes.

You may want to follow these steps as you introduce gender-inclusive restrooms and signage:

- Hold a panel on the topic.
- Have office hours with HR or agency leadership for individuals to discuss concerns or questions in real time.
- Identify, as available, a single stall, gender nonrestrictive restroom for anyone who has additional need for privacy, regardless of the reason. Incorporate pointing out this restroom during orientation of new employees.
- Include stories demystifying the LGBTQ+ community in agency publications, newsletters and intranet articles.
- Encourage your employees to attend RAIN general membership meetings, and for those who are interested, to participate in subcommittee work.
- Develop, promote and support an internal agency LGBTQ+ affinity group.

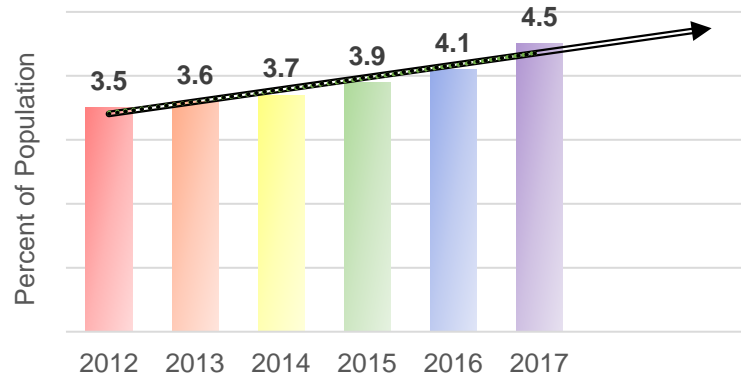
⁵ Although these recommendations are inclusive of LGBTQ+ employees and customers, we urge you to consider all your employees and make the signs as accessible as possible. This can include adding Braille and raised letters and selecting inclusive images.



Washington state

Nationally, polling data collected by Gallup shows there has been a steady increase in the percentage of U.S. adults who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, or LGBT, from 3.5% in 2012 to 4.5% in 2017.⁶

Percentage of U.S. adults identifying as LGBT has been steadily increasing over past 6 years.



The Pacific Region of the United States (Alaska, Washington, Oregon, California, Hawaii and Alaska) saw the greatest increase in LGBT identification, from 4.2% percent in 2012–13 to 4.9% in 2015–16.

In Washington, Gallup polling showed that 4.6% percent of adults identified as LGBT during the same time period.⁷

While the increase in adults identifying as LGBTQ+ grows, there continues to be risk in the disclosure of membership in the LGBTQ+ community. Discrimination and violence against the LGBTQ+ community persists despite some progress.

According to the Human Rights Campaign, 21 states prohibit discrimination in housing and employment based on both sexual orientation and gender identity. Additionally, 18 states address hate or bias crimes based on sexual orientation and gender identity.⁸

The FBI's 2016 hate crime statistics showed an increase in violence against the LGBTQ+ community. According to data voluntarily reported to the FBI by various law enforcement agencies across the country, 6,121 hate crime incidents against the LGBTQ+ community occurred in 2016. Analysis from the Human Rights Campaign showed this represents an increase of 5% from 2015.⁹

⁶ Frank Newport. (2018). [In U.S., Estimate of LGBT Population Rises to 4.5%](#) Gallup website.

⁷ Gary J. Gates. (2017). [Vermont Leads State in LGBT Identification](#) Gallup website.

⁸ Human Rights Campaign. [State Maps of Laws and Policies](#). Accessed September 6, 2018.

⁹ Human Rights Campaign. [New FBI Data Shows Increased Reported Incidents Anti-LGBTQ Hate Crimes in 2016](#). Accessed September 6, 2018.



Employer of choice

On June 23, 2016, Gov. Jay Inslee issued Directive 16–11: The LGBTQ+ Inclusion and Safe Places Initiative. Its purpose was to advance the state’s goal of diversity and inclusion, and to reiterate that, “[e]very person in the state of Washington has the right to feel safe, enjoy the benefits of public services, and fully participate in civic life.”

In this directive, Inslee laid out three priorities:

- The development of an LGBTQ+ Employee Resource Group¹⁰
- The development of a best practices group
- The development of a safe place program

The LGBTQ+ Employee Resource Group, later referred to as the Rainbow Alliance Inclusion Network, or RAIN Business Resource Group, was launched in January 2017. The Best Practices Group started at the same time as a RAIN subcommittee. Its goal is to research and establish best practices to make Washington state an employer of choice and a safe place for LGBTQ+ employees to work ([see charter](#)).

Responses from a survey of RAIN members identified gender-inclusive signage as a top priority in achieving this goal.

The business case

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, by the year 2025 millennials will compose 75% of the workforce. Many millennials are foreign-born, biracial or LGBTQ+ and they define diversity differently from previous generations. For them, diversity is an individual mix of unique experiences, identities, ideas and opinions more so than any single trait.

According to Deloitte, diversity and inclusion lead to better business performance. “When employees think their organization is committed to, and supportive of diversity and they feel included, employees report better business performance in terms of ability to innovate, (83%) responsiveness to changing customer needs (31%) and team collaboration (42%).”¹¹

Changing restroom signs to be more inclusive of people’s gender identity is one opportunity to support LGBTQ+ staff and may help state government retain diverse, top talent.

¹⁰ Employee resource groups that are staffed by Office of Financial Management’s State Human Resource employees are now referred to as business resource groups, or BRGs, due to the tie to a business need.

¹¹ Deloitte. (2013) [Waiter, is that Inclusion in my Soup?](#) Accessed June 27, 2019.

Case studies

Several state agencies have changed or are in the process of changing bathroom signage. Their experience may provide insight on the process, outcomes, barriers and concerns that arose during their transition to gender-inclusive signage.

Office of Financial Management, State Human Resources

The assistant director of State Human Resources decided to update signage at the State HR offices housed in OFM. This decision was based on recommendations made during a presentation covering basic LGBTQ+ vocabulary and other LGBTQ+ resources on Gov. Inslee's Directive 16-11.

Proposal: The original proposal consisted of five recommendations; two were specific to restroom signage:

- To add gender-affirming signs to multi-stall restrooms.
- To remove gender-restricting signs from single use showers and restrooms.

Steps taken: Educational materials were provided to employees at a regular staff meeting. Leadership reaffirmed that the changes aligned with the values of the organization, including OFM as an employer of choice and as a respectful, diverse and inclusive employer. Employees were encouraged to reach out to the Employee Assistance Program, OFM, State HR or management with questions or concerns.

To date: Single occupancy individual shower restrooms were designated as gender nonrestrictive. All multi-stall restrooms have gender affirming signage that reads "You are welcome to use the restroom that best aligns with your gender identity."







Department of Health

A Department of Health work group recently proposed to its leadership updating signage of bathrooms to address feelings of safety and dis/comfort when using restrooms.¹²

The proposed change was designed over four stages, with a recommendation that all stages be implemented over a period of time determined by leadership and to schedule six-month assessments on progress by the work group.

Proposed language/look for signs:

Type of Bathroom	Language for signs	Look of signs
Single stall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With or without “All Gender” at the top • “This bathroom is for everyone” added at the bottom of sign • Gender neutral figures 	<p>ALL GENDER</p>  <p>This bathroom is for everyone.</p>
Multi-stall segregated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Men” or “Women” at the top • “Please use the bathroom that most closely aligns with your gender identity” added below • Gender neutral figures 	<p>MEN</p>  <p>Please use the bathroom that most closely aligns with your gender identity.</p>
Multi-stall (no showers) integrated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “All Gender” at the top • “This is a multi-stall bathroom” • Gender neutral figures • Image of a toilet 	<p>ALL GENDER</p>  <p>This is a multi-stall bathroom.</p>
Multi-stall (with showers) integrated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “All Gender” at the top • “This is a multi-stall bathroom” • Gender neutral figures • Image of a shower, toilet and urinal 	<p>ALL GENDER</p>  <p>This is a multi-stall bathroom.</p>

Stages proposed:

Stage 1: Add gender-neutral signage on all single-stall bathrooms.

Stage 2: Add gender-neutral language to signage on all bathrooms.

Stage 3: Convert bathrooms that have stalls and no showers to gender neutral.

¹² This information was collected from DOH in the fall of 2018. Information and processes may have changed. For the most up-to-date information regarding this change, please contact DOH's Human Resources office.

Stage 4: Convert bathrooms that have stalls and showers to gender neutral.

Steps taken: The DOH Diversity Committee and agency leadership looked at stages of implementation, conducted a stakeholder analysis (Appendix A) and designed a PowerPoint presentation with proposed signage that was shared with staff.

To date: Stage 1 has been implemented. Discussion on the other stages continues.

Employment Security Department

The commissioner asked about gender neutral bathrooms in ESD which started the conversation on bathrooms and signage. Knowing that other agencies had started the process of putting up gender affirming signs, ESD's equal opportunity and diversity manager reached out to OFM about the steps it had taken.

ESD proposed to add gender-affirming language to the restroom signs, starting with the Maple Park building.

Steps taken: A communication plan was put together. Executive leadership was trained on gender identity and given the plan to update signs. All supervisors were trained on gender identity. Two lunch-and-learn panels were held on gender in the workplace. Emails updated staff. The gender training was open up to all agency employees, not just managers. The equal opportunity manager held open office hours before and after each training and additional office hours when time permitted for anyone to come ask questions or voice concerns. Written resources were provided.

To date: All multi-stall restrooms in ESD's Maple Park building have gender-affirming signage that reads, "You are welcome to use the bathroom that best aligns with your gender identity."



Interviews

The interviews below were gathered to give agencies an idea of the impact and effects of having gendered restrooms on LGBTQ+ employees. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, steps were taken to protect individual identities. This included having the individuals give their stories verbally and the answers transcribed by members of the Best Practice Group. Once transcribed, each individual was able to review and confirm that what was transcribed was an accurate representation of what they said. Because of this, the interviews are written in the form of questions and answers, and are from the perspective of the transcriber.

Anonymous interview 1

The experience in this interview is from a transgender woman working in a large Washington state agency.

What is your experience using the restroom without gender-inclusive improvements?

Using the restroom was especially difficult for her at the beginning of transitioning. There is no gender-neutral restroom option in her work building. Fear and anxiety cause delay in using the restroom. She then questions if her anxiety is based on reality. She drinks little water to minimize the need for the restroom during work. When she does use the restroom, she mentioned that it is like going on a recon mission.

She has rules she repeats in her mind:

- No talking
- Leave space between herself and others (if there are three stalls and someone is in the first, go to the third).

Every time she walks into the restroom there is fear. Her heart beats fast and she becomes hyperaware. She says it causes her to hold her breath, to feel like she is walking on eggshells. She says that it is not healthy and is mentally taxing.

Using the restroom in all public places is hard and scary for her because she does not know people. She always has to think before going out.

What could have been helpful for you along the way?

All single stall, general use in the same space would be best, but realistically having one gender-neutral bathroom would allow her to use the restroom in peace, without looking over her shoulder. Also, not compromise her professional career due to bathroom use. Getting asked what bathroom you use is not something a cisgender¹³ person encounters.

Other things that would help her are opportunities to build relationships with coworkers, and having different facilities pointed out on a new-employee tour of the building.

¹³ A person whose gender identity and sex assigned at birth align.



What would change for you if gender-affirming signs were added to the bathrooms?

It would be an immediate sign that the agency was taking steps to be inclusive and the agency/authority figures have her back. The signs would help her coworkers better understand, and make cisgender colleagues aware too. The signs would also let her know her agency is trying to be a safe place.

Anonymous interview 2

The experience in this testimonial is from a genderqueer¹⁴ individual working in a large state agency.

What is your experience using the restroom without gender-inclusive improvements?

Using the restroom for them is an anxiety-driven experience. There is no gender nonrestrictive bathrooms in their building. When they have to use the restroom, they use the restroom that makes them feel safest, safety always being the focus.

When they first started working in their agency, they would hold their bladder as long as possible and try to avoid drinking any water for extended periods of time. When they did have to use the restroom, they approached the situation cautiously and quickly.

They mentioned how every time they walked into the restroom their face get hot, and it would feel as if sound was magnified. They made sure to look down and rush into the stall.

Over time, and after building relationships with their coworkers and management, they have become more comfortable using the restroom in their agency. A contributing factor to them feeling comfortable was the openness and support of their coworkers and management. Their management put pronouns in their signature lines and talk about diversity, equity and inclusion as an ongoing conversation. As a group they have taken trainings on diversity and LGBTQ+Q+ specific topics. Their management also added diversity, equity and inclusion to their strategic plan to better help customers. They feel these actions have established a safe environment for them to bring their true self to work every day. As a result, they no longer restrict their water drinking and use the restroom when they need to.

However, no matter how comfortable they become, they still have underlying fear and anxiety.

What could have been helpful for you along the way?

The most helpful thing would be gender nonrestrictive bathrooms available in every building. Realistically though, the people around them are the most helpful. The people they work with have taken steps to create an environment that is safe, where they are able to use the restroom with less fear and anxiety because they know that they have support. The comfort of knowing they have an ally, or in this case multiple allies, has been the most helpful thing.

¹⁴ Someone who does not identify within the conventional gender binary of a man or woman. For people who identify outside of the binary the pronoun "them" is used.



What would change for you if gender-affirming signs were added to the bathrooms?

They would not change which bathroom they used. Instead they would use the same restroom but with slightly more comfort knowing that someone who has enough authority to make those decisions has put thought and energy into adding the signs. It does not change their action, but it does let them know someone sees and cares about them.

Concerns and barriers

Employees and customers alike need restrooms. By adding gender-affirming language to signs, agencies are taking steps to provide equal access to everyone.

It should be noted that while concerns have been raised, agencies that have implemented new signage have done so largely without conflict.

These concerns fell mainly into two categories:

- Personal and religious beliefs
- Individuals falsely claiming to be a specific gender to access the restroom for inappropriate reasons

While some individuals expressed concern, discomfort and fear about changing the signage for restrooms, this was largely due to misinformation that updating signs would somehow change restroom norms or usage. In general, these concerns were addressed and fears allayed by explaining the intent of this work (inclusion) and the desired outcome (supporting all employees). In response to individuals' concerns, one agency purchased inserts for the gaps between stalls in its restrooms. Similarly, one agency had employees raise concerns about if they walked into a restroom, felt uncomfortable and left to use another facility. Could a discrimination complaint be filed against them?

Adding gender-affirming language to the sign does not change restroom norms. As always, any inappropriate behavior in a restroom should be reported and handled accordingly, regardless of the individual's gender identity. As stated in WAC 162-32-060, "Any action taken against a person who is using a restroom or other gender-segregated facility, such as removing a person, should be taken due to that person's actions or behavior while in the facility, and must be unrelated to gender expression or gender identity. The same standards of conduct and behavior must be consistently applied to all facility users, regardless of gender expression or gender identity."

In the event someone is uncomfortable using the restroom with someone else based on their gender identity, the first person should seek a different facility to use. As stated in WAC 162-32-060, "If another person expresses concern or discomfort about a person who uses a facility that is consistent with the person's gender expression or gender identity, the person expressing discomfort should be directed to a separate or gender-neutral facility, if available."

Barriers that arose largely related to facilities.



New signs with gender-affirming language should be applied to all gendered facilities, not just bathrooms with stalls. This includes bathrooms with showers and changing areas. As stated in WAC 162-32-060, “All covered entities shall allow individuals the use of gender-segregated facilities, such as restrooms, locker rooms, dressing rooms, and homeless or emergency shelters, that are consistent with that individual’s gender expression or gender identity. In such facilities where undressing in the presence of others occurs, covered entities shall allow access to and use of a facility consistent with that individual's gender expression or gender identity.”

Agencies should work directly with their building maintenance staff to address tenant/owner issues. Thus far, building landlords have been very accommodating about updating signage and working with agencies to achieve the best outcomes possible.

Additional resources

- [Washington State Law on Gender Segregated Facilities](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions about WAC 162-32-060 Gender-segregated Facilities](#)
- [Transgender People and Bathroom Access FAQ](#)
- [2015 U.S. Transgender Survey Report](#)
- [Transgender Inclusion in the Workplace: A Toolkit for Employers](#)
- [FAQ: Answers to Some Common Questions about Equal Access to Public Restrooms](#)
- [Response to Petition to Repeal WAC 162-32-060](#)



Agency example documents

The following are materials that state agencies have used in transitioning to more-inclusive restrooms.

DOH Stakeholder Analysis and Decision Paper for Bathroom Inclusivity Project.

Stakeholder Analysis

Stakeholder	Interest	Impact level (Direct, influence, affected)	Current position (supportive, neutral, opposed)	Potential Key Message
Human Resources	Potential increase in questions and/or complaints, employer of choice (recruitment and retention as well as engagement), addition to new employee orientation during tour	Direct	Supportive but cautious	Make sure DOH is employer of choice, support staff in feeling they can bring their whole self to work
DOH staff/contract employee/interns	Being safe and feeling comfortable using the bathrooms	Affected; influence	Supportive, neutral and opposed depending on staff person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Going to the bathroom is not a privilege, but a right. -Many trans* and gender nonconforming people will avoid using the bathroom if not given a safe or anxiety free option -Not using the bathroom when one needs to can cause severe health problems such as dehydration, malnutrition, or a UTI depending on how one deals with not having a bathroom option. -We can't assume there is not a problem or this only impacts a small number of individuals. --This reinforces DOH's commitment to diversity and inclusion
Facilities (including Safety and Security)	Physical work updating signage, eventually bathrooms (?); safety/security	Direct	Supportive if agency agrees to move forward	This is an opportunity to support equity at DOH; Importance of being an inclusive organization so people feel safe and comfortable.



Stakeholder	Interest	Impact level (Direct, influence, affected)	Current position (supportive, neutral, opposed)	Potential Key Message
	may have increase in complaints			
Building Owners	Physical work could be done to their building; we need to stay within their lease/guidelines/ Who will pay for it? What is the cost?	Direct	Unknown	We will continue to adhere to your guidelines; we are just doing our best to make this an inclusive workplace. Convey information about the cost as well.
Leadership— including JOLT	Potential increase in questions and/or complaints, employer of choice (recruitment and retention as well as engagement); making staff feel safe and comfortable is using bathrooms; handling potential general uproar; would need to approve changes	Direct at every level/step of process	Supportive, neutral and opposed depending on individual and level of aggressiveness of policy	Provide option(s) to phase the policy in and convert one or two bathrooms at a time in each building after changing signage on one stall bathroom; This is an opportunity to support equity at DOH; Importance of being an inclusive organization so people feel safe and comfortable.
Individuals handling complaints: employee services, appointing authorities (deputies) and/or labor relations	Potential increase in questions and/or complaints	Direct	Should be neutral in enforcing policy; in reality may vary dependent on situation.	This is DOH's policy and we all must adhere to it.
Consumers-residents of state	May see a precedent with which they do or don't agree.	Affected	Supportive, neutral and opposed depending on individual and level of aggressiveness of policy	DOH is setting a precedent in being inclusive and representative of the communities we serve.



Stakeholder	Interest	Impact level (Direct, influence, affected)	Current position (supportive, neutral, opposed)	Potential Key Message
Friends in labor relations/unions	Bargaining with unions on potential impact to employees	Direct	Dependent on reaction of represented employees	May be dependent on previous policies and labor's reactions; we're pushing this forward so all DOH employees will have the right to use the bathroom with which they are comfortable. Right now, we are not operating in a way that fulfills everyone's rights.
Office for Civil Rights and Risk Management (CRRM)	Spearheading the policy, handling complaints, answering questions	Direct	Supportive	Role: Delivering/crafting message.
LGBTQ+Q Business Resource Group, Gay City, Gender Justice League.	Vetting policy, signs and messages	Direct	Supportive	Role: Providing input as needed on messaging.

DECISION PAPER: ALL-INCLUSIVE BATHROOMS

Date: 5/9/2018

Person Submitting: Shawn Murinko

Problem Statement: Because our facilities are set up with traditional male/female (“cisgender”) bathrooms, not everyone at DOH feels comfortable and/or safe accessing the bathroom.

Background: For transgender and gender nonconforming individuals, gender-segregated bathrooms can be spaces where they are met with intimidation, harassment, and/or violence. Gender segregated bathrooms threaten the safety of many transgender and gender nonconforming individuals. In addition to being a safety concern, this bathroom configuration can lead to health concerns. When one does not have a bathroom option that they feel comfortable and/or safe accessing, they may choose to not use the bathroom. Avoiding use of the bathroom can cause serious health problems.

Significance: This process will reinforce DOH’s commitment to diversity and inclusion. This is a way to demonstrate that DOH values everyone, and cares about the health and safety of all.

Key Stakeholders & Interests:

See attached

Stages:

1. All single-stall bathrooms get a gender-neutral sign.
2. Put gender neutral signs on all bathrooms.
3. Convert non-shower bathrooms into gender neutral bathrooms (with stalls only).
4. Convert all bathrooms into gender neutral bathrooms (with stalls and showers).

Analysis:

Stage 1. Only two/three bathrooms on the DOH campus would be accessible for all. Costs are minimal to add gender neutral signs to these two/three bathrooms.

Stage 2. Bathrooms on the DOH campus would remain gender-segregated but signage would be more inclusive to trans and gender nonconforming individuals. Costs would be minimal to add to current signs on all bathrooms.

Stage 3. All bathrooms without showers on the DOH campus would be accessible to all.

Stage 4. All bathrooms on the DOH campus would be accessible to all.

Recommendations:

We highly recommend the four stages be implemented with progress assessed every six months by this group to determine next steps.

Contact: Shawn Murinko

(360) 236-4010 or shawn.murinko@doh.wa.gov