

**Testimony on Behalf of An Act Concerning Customer Access to Restrooms in Retail Establishments
Raised Bill (No. 6328)**

February 6, 2009

Senator Harris, Representative Ritter, Co-Chairs, Vice-Chairs, Ranking Members and Distinguished Members of the Connecticut Public Health Committee:

I greatly appreciate having the opportunity to give and submit testimony in support of the Public Health Committee's Raised Bill No. 6328, *An Act Concerning Customer Access to Restrooms in Retail Establishments* sponsored by Representatives Joseph Taborsak and Themis Klarides.

As President of the Central Connecticut Chapter of the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of America (CCFA), I am speaking on behalf of members and friends of our organization. We strongly support this simple but important legislation. It would enable individuals, who have Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis, irritable bowel syndrome or similar medical conditions, to access the toilet facilities of retail establishments that do not have public restrooms.

I cannot overemphasize how critically important this legislation is to the thousands of adults and children with Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis in Connecticut who frequently suffer from sudden and extreme attacks of diarrhea. Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis are both Inflammatory Bowel Diseases (IBD) marked by an abnormal response by the body's immune system. Over 1.4 million individuals have Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis and approximately 16,000 of those are in Connecticut. Affected individuals may range in age from shortly after birth to the oldest ages but approximately 10 percent of those affected -- or an estimated 100,000 nationally-- are youngsters under the age of 18.

The symptoms of IBD are persistent diarrhea; "crampy", abdominal pain; fever; and, at times, rectal bleeding but they vary from person to person and may change over time. Loss of appetite, fatigue and subsequent weight loss also may occur and children may suffer delayed growth. Because IBD is an auto immune disorder, the diseases are not always limited to the GI tract; the joints, eyes, skin, and liver can also be affected.

Emotional stress can influence the course of Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis but it does not cause the diseases. However, the emotional distress that individuals with IBD sometimes feel is a reaction to the symptoms of the disease itself. It is not surprising that some individuals find it difficult to cope with a chronic illness. Such illnesses seem to pose a threat to their entire quality of life -- their physical and emotional well-being, social functioning, and sense of self-esteem. Coping techniques for dealing with IBD may take many forms. Attacks of diarrhea, pain, or gas may make people fearful of being in public places.

During my years as a Board Member and President of the Central Connecticut Chapter of the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of America, I have become very aware of the health needs of individuals which make access to restrooms urgent -- these are a few of their experiences:

- Parents talk about jogging around malls trying to get their young child to the bathroom before the onset of diarrhea,
- A 70 year old woman, ill with ulcerative colitis, embarrassed by her symptoms and depressed by her inability to engage in activities in the public domain, remains isolated at home,
- My son became severely ill with Crohn's disease at 16 and although his pain could be severe, it was the sudden attacks of intestinal urgency which greatly limited his ability to socialize in the wider community, and

- A 13 year old girl who became severely anxious and depressed after experiencing a fierce attack of diarrhea in public when she couldn't make it to a bathroom.

Obviously, this is not a subject easily discussed in public or in your committee. Imagine then, how difficult it is for an individual who needs rapid access to a bathroom to discuss his or her situation and plead for access while beset by urgency and cramping. A *Restroom Access Act* would have a very positive impact on the quality of life for many individuals with these serious, chronic illnesses but involve relatively minor costs and inconvenience for others.

The Connecticut Chapters of the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of America sponsor inspirational and fund raising walks (Take Steps), offer Support Groups, distribute educational information and literature, work cooperatively with gastroenterologists, offer free educational programs and, in circumstances like this, advocate on behalf of our constituents. We believe that *An Act Concerning Customer Access to Restrooms In Retail Establishments* [#6324] would be greatly beneficial to individuals with Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis.

On behalf of our CCFA Central Connecticut Chapter and the individuals we serve, we urge you to support Raised Bill No. 6328.

Thank you very much.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sally Connolly
249 Newton Rd
Woodbridge, CT 06525
203.393.1424
sallyconnolly@sbcglobal.net

President, Central Connecticut Chapter Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of America
PO Box 275
Branford, CT 06405
203.208.3130
www.ccfa.org