

23 March 2016

HF 3396/ HF 3395 and SF 3002

Testifier: Anne Taylor

I am mother of two – both a teenager and a preschooler – who is very much in support of these bills.

A little over year ago I was with my youngest child at a swim facility called FOSS Swim School where I first encountered the use of changing rooms in which there IS zero separated male/female changing facilities available.

Even though I am a former lifeguard and Aquatic Swim Instructor for 8 years, I was not prepared for what I would encounter in an all open changing facility with my children while at the newly remodeled St. Louis Park location.

When I approached the desk at the newly remodeled facility, I asked where the Women's changing rooms were located. The employee said that they were all now one. Confused, I inquired where and how people change their clothing in this new space. I was then told that there are no designated male/female stations - instead there were individual stalls for privacy in one large, open space.

I recall asking, "So my child and I have to change clothes next to someone of the opposite sex? (I have two girls) That doesn't seem right and I don't think I'm comfortable with this."

The employee behind the desk did not apologize, follow up, or explain anything else as I headed into the 'big room' with my youngest child in tow.

Upon entering the space, there were men, women and children inside this big changing area. There were approximately 15 individual changing stalls, of which an inch to two inches were exposed both above and below the changing stalls – enough to slide a smartphone through.

There were 4 full unisex bathrooms, each with handicap facilities including showers and a heavy locked door and with zero exposure as the bathrooms themselves are entirely enclosed (this was the only place where I felt I could change my youngest child). Previously, the location had 3 separate changing rooms with bathroom stalls: Male, Female and Family. Now? All one.

And while there are separate changing stalls and private bathroom accommodations for the handicap, there are no accommodations for separate sexes, I expressed my concern as well as disappointment that myself and my child would be required to change in and out of bathing suits alongside other adults of the opposite sex.

My oldest child's response? "If I have to change in a place like that, I would ask you to take me out and not come back."

Young developing girls, as well as boys, are in need of privacy as well as dignity and feel the new layout at the St. Louis Park location does not accommodate for that at all.

Upon speaking directly to owner Jon Foss, it was clear staff, construction crews and state laws do NOT consider this during a remodel phase.

This experience brought about concerns for safety of children and families as the new changing site appeared to be a 'free for all' during full sessions with so many people coming and going and all in one large room. While I did note a female employee wandering in and out of the changing facility, I wondered what her role was in the changing room and for what purpose? What if it had been a male employee?

These kinds of changing facilities goes against our family values in that my children will not be conditioned to thinking that these types of accommodation are the new norm.

It is increasingly difficult for people to maintain their right to privacy while businesses are being bullied into utilizing both gender locker rooms and opening women's bathrooms to men.

I find these kinds of accommodations unhealthy, both mentally and emotionally, while not only violating the privacy of children but exploiting them, including adults by choosing to host a 'one-room-only' changing sites.