

January 21, 2016

To Whom it may concern;

I am writing to you about the lack of accessible, gender inclusive change rooms in the University of Calgary Kinesiology building. I am a non-binary trans person, this means I live my life as neither a man nor a woman. When people meet me they often don't know what my gender is; sometimes they assume I am a man, sometimes they assume I'm a woman. I have gone on hormones and had surgery so that I experience less dysphoria with my body and I am happier in my body. My body nor my identity can fit into a binary gender system.

Last week I started studying at the University of Calgary. I was looking forward to having access to the fitness facilities. I went to the help desk in Kinesiology to find out about the sports facilities and while I was there I discovered that there are only men's and women's change rooms. This is a huge barrier for me using the facilities. Though the person at the help desk said I could use whatever change room I feel the most comfortable in, that is exactly the problem: I don't feel comfortable in either and likely wouldn't be that safe in either. If I used the women's change room (which is the gender I was told I was when I was a kid), I would likely make women really uncomfortable because they likely would perceive me as a man. I also don't identify as a woman and using that change room and fitting into that gender box was something I had to do for my entire life, and I won't do it anymore. Though the men's change room would feel slightly more correct for my gender, I don't think I would be safe there because I'm not always perceived as a man and I think this would open me to harassment and violence. I have also heard that there are no private changing spaces or even private showers in the men's change room and there is no way for me to be perceived as a man in that circumstance. This feels very unsafe. It would still feel unsafe if there were private change room facilities in the men's change room because people still might be violent towards me.

Neither of these 2 options would work for me in the sense that neither would be gender affirming and neither would be safe.

I would like to note too that many Trans people who identify within the gender binary are also not safe in men and women's change rooms. Many Trans men might look really similarly to me, and might face similar fears of violence and harassment in men's change rooms. The same is true for trans women in terms of being harassed and experiencing violence in women's washrooms.

I have been thinking about the ways this situation contributes to discrimination against Trans communities. The world is not made for us to feel welcome and to have basic access to things - in this case physical health, which is also linked with mental health. My family doctor said that one of the key ways of coping with depression is with exercise. This is another reason why I want to use the gym: to improve my mental health. Mental health issues are one of the issues that trans communities face: 43% of Trans Canadians have attempted suicide (according to Trans pulse 2009), and over 70% of trans Canadians have seriously considered it. Universities and other institutions should be addressing the issue of depression and suicidality in trans communities, not contributing to it through institutional barriers.

I would also like to note that a gender neutral, accessible family change room would have a positive impact on accessibility in more ways than just Trans accessibility. Most gender inclusive change rooms I've seen are also family change rooms and made to be accessible for people with physical disabilities. When I was speaking to a number of friends in the Trans community, one friend said they wouldn't be able to use the facilities at the U of C even if they identified with the gender binary (which they do not), because they have children who they would need to take with them who wouldn't be allowed in the change room.

I spoke with another friend in the LGBTQ+ community who has a physical disability, and he said he stopped going to the gym at the U of C because he didn't feel comfortable and because it didn't feel accessible. He expanded to say that the facility was too cramped and was not designed to be accessible. He said because of his limited balance and fine motor coordination, he needs more space between

benches and lockers, and this is definitely true for people in wheelchairs as well who also have an even harder time with the narrow way the change room is laid out. He said at the U of C men's change room the benches didn't work for him not only because they are too close, but because they are too narrow and too high: because he couldn't touch the ground, he would fall forward when he tried to tie his shoes. There are other ways the change room is not accessible to people with disabilities but fairly easily could be: the floors are slippery which is a hazard for people with balance issues and could be corrected with more frequent mopping or anti-slip mats, and that the area is highly scented, which doesn't work so well for people with scent allergies or sensitivities.

Please address these issues ASAP and build some gender inclusive washrooms that are accessible to families and people with disabilities too. This is a human rights and accessibility issue. For an example, I'd recommend looking at the family washroom at the Talisman Centre. I was really impressed because these washrooms have a variety of options for showering, families, lifts and other accessibility features, change rooms, etc. For marketing about Trans inclusion in washrooms and policies relating to it, I'd recommend looking at the City of Vancouver parks and recreation as an example for best practices.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Brett Mason". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Brett Mason