

DOES DOWNTOWN WASHINGTON DC HAVE RESTROOMS THAT ARE CLEAN, SAFE, AND AVAILABLE TO EVERYONE 24/7? ^{1 2}

Design, Data Collection, Analysis and Report prepared by the People for Fairness Coalition (PFFC) Downtown Washington DC Public Restroom Committee ³

WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DID

People for Fairness Coalition (PFC) was founded by individuals who are without housing or have been without housing in the past in order to ensure that DC residents lacking housing have access to affordable housing through advocacy, outreach, and peer mentoring.

Between December, 2014 and February, 2015 members of PFFC's [Downtown DC Public Restroom Initiative](#) visited 85 establishments in five areas in Downtown Washington, DC in order to find out whether pedestrians in these areas have adequate access to restrooms that are clean, safe, and available at any time of the day or night. We also did an internet search in an effort to identify restrooms in downtown DC that are open to the public 24/7.

We selected five areas ⁴ based on two criteria:

- Presence of sizable concentrations of individuals who lack housing;
- Heavy foot traffic among pedestrians: tourists, shoppers, diners, people walking through or coming through by bicycle, individuals who are restroom challenged.

In each area we visited a sample of food and coffee chains and franchises. We also visited a sample of private restaurants and other private establishments. In all we visited half of the establishments in each area.

WHAT WE LEARNED:

1. Who comes to these five areas and why (varies by area):

Who Comes

- Tourists
- Movie goers
- Museum goers
- Verizon center attendees
- People visiting the library
- Shoppers
- Diners
- Bars goers
- Walkers, joggers/bicycle riders
- People who lack housing

Why they come

- See historic sites
- Attend movies/other entertainment
- Visit art galleries/museum
- Go shopping
- Buy coffee
- Eat at food chains/franchises
- Fine dining (lunch & dinner)
- Go to bars
- Passing through
- Hang out
- In four areas many come via Metro

1. Public restrooms (off the Mall) available in/near two of the five areas we visited:

Area	Public restrooms in/near area
Gallery Place:	Union Station (5 am – 12 am daily) National Portrait Gallery (11 am – 7 pm daily)

¹ Information on public restrooms was updated in August, 2018

² A more detailed report may be found at www.pffcdc.org/what-we-do/public-restrooms.

³ The PFFC Downtown Washington DC Public Restroom Committee includes John McDermott, George Olivar and Janet Sharp. They are supported by Marcia Bernbaum and Ken Durham. For further information contact marcy@pffcdc.org or 240-498-4802.

⁴ The five areas are: *Gallery Place* primarily along 7th St.; *Georgetown* along M St. between 28th and 33rd Sts, *Dupont Circle*, primarily along Connecticut Ave, the *K St. Corridor* between 13th and 17th Sts.; *Columbia Heights* on Irving between 15th and 14th Sts. and on 14th St. between Irving and Park Rd.

	National Building Museum (10 am – 5 pm Mon – Fri, 11am – 5 pm Sunday)
K Street Corridor	Lafayette Park (7 am – 3 pm daily) White House Visitors Center (7:30 am – 4 pm daily)
Dupont Circle	---
Georgetown	---
Columbia Heights	---

2. Restrooms available in private restaurants and food/coffee chains and franchises in the five areas we visited

Of the 85 establishments that we visited, a little over half (43) let us use their restrooms.

99% of the restrooms that we entered were clean & safe

74% were in private restaurants

49% were in coffee/food chains & franchises

Restrooms available from 5 am until midnight:	<i>Gallery Place & Dupont Circle</i>
No restrooms available until 10 am:	<i>Georgetown & Columbia Heights</i>
Very few restrooms available after 6 pm:	<i>K St. Corridor</i>

None were clearly marked as having restrooms open to the public.

3. Clean, safe restrooms in/near downtown DC that are open 24/7

We identified 7 facilities with restrooms open 24/7 that are clean and safe: only 2 are open to the public; the remaining 5 are privately owned and can choose to limit access.

Public Restrooms

*Lincoln Memorial (900 Ohio Dr. NW),
Jefferson Memorial, (708 E Basin Dr., SE),*

Privately Owned

*Giant Food (1345 Park Rd, NW),
Safeway (1855 Wisconsin Ave. NW,),
Safeway, (490 L. St. NW),
7-11, (504 19th St NW)
Subway (1600 Connecticut Ave NW)*

Columbia Heights and Dupont Circle were the only areas we visited that have a restroom open 24/7. To get to the nearest restroom in the other four areas that are open 24/7, it is necessary to walk between a half-mile and 1 mile.

The Lincoln & Jefferson memorials, the only two in all of DC with public restrooms open 24/7, are between 1.5 and 2 miles from nearest downtown area that we visited and require walking in areas that aren't well lit.

There are no signs indicating that these restrooms exist, and none are clearly marked

OTHER FINDINGS

1. Restrooms at metro stops are for customers only

However, very few metro stops have signs posted indicating that their restrooms are open to customers

2. The following coffee and food chains & franchise in downtown make their restrooms available to the public in some of their locations while at other locations access to restrooms is limited to customers only:

McDonalds,	The Corner Bakery,
Subway,	Cosi,
Dunkin Donuts,	Five Guys, Shop
Au Bon Pain,	Sweet Greens
Pizzeria Paradiso	

Since the Spring of 2018 all Starbucks are open to the public.

3. Managers of chains and franchises can decide whether to close their restrooms to the public; and they are increasingly doing so.

OUR CONCLUSIONS

When you are in downtown Washington DC and you have to urgently go:

Unless you know the area, you will have a hard time finding a restroom that will let you in during the day and evening

There are a limited number of public restrooms, their hours are limited, and they are not marked.

- Public libraries (only 2 in downtown DC)
- Museums and memorials along the National Mall
- Lafayette Square and the White House Visitors Center

With the exception of Starbucks, private establishments with restrooms may or may not to let you use their restroom unless you are a customer, they are also not marked.

- Half of the coffee/food chains & franchises we visited have locks on their restrooms doors; managers are increasingly putting locks on their restroom doors
- Depending on where you are, you may or may not be able to find private establishments with restrooms available early in the morning or in the evening

It will be extremely difficult to find a restroom late at night/early in the morning

There are only 7 restrooms open 24/7 in downtown Washington DC, they aren't marked either

- Only two are publicly owned. The remaining for are privately owned. Managers, at their discretion, can limit restroom access.
- To access a public restroom open to the public 24/7 you will have to walk between a 1 ½ and 3 miles.

This study clearly confirms that there IS a problem when it comes to access to clean, safe public restrooms in downtown Washington DC open 24/7. It also raises some important questions that we plan to address in future studies: one is the experience of individuals who are housing unstable when they seek restrooms.