

OPINION

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Bathroom Bills' Don't Help Women at All

Stop trying to legislate discrimination

BY JILL RICHARDSON

The time has come for me to play my Woman Card.

A male Republican politician in my state of Wisconsin has introduced a "bathroom bill" like the one passed in North Carolina, which requires transgender people to use the bathroom of the gender they were assigned at birth.

He says it's to "protect women and children."

Oh, knight in shining armor,

thank you for trying to protect me and my fellow women. But I fear you misunderstand the real issues women have in restrooms.

Here are a few laws you might propose instead to help us out:



Ban men from leaving the toilet seat up, so we don't fall in. Mandate that public restrooms never run out of toilet paper, so we're not left stranded in stalls, fishing through our purses on the off chance we'll find

some tissues. Require establishments to make more bathrooms available for women, particularly in places like theaters — where everyone gets up to use the restroom at the same time, and men hurry in and out while women

spend 10 minutes or more in line.

But those are, relatively speaking, all quite trivial.

Perhaps instead, you'd prefer to help with the bigger issues we women face. In that case, my biggest concern is that I will, on average, earn less than a man, even for doing the same job.

If you're still intent on legislating values, though, how about weighing in on some of these?

If I assert myself the way a man does, I'll be seen as shrill. Pursuing a PhD, as I'm doing, hurts my dating prospects among men intimidated by my education — even as higher education is seen to make men prime marriage material.

I was raised in a culture that communicated to me continuous-

ly that my role as a woman is to be thin, beautiful, and passive, so that a man can rescue me. And when dating, I'm forced to choose between seeming prudish or promiscuous — both of which carry a social penalty.

I want to live a world where young girls are taught to be strong and capable, just like little boys. Where a woman's self-worth is not equal to her clothing size, or her sexual availability.

And then there's sexual assault, which brings us back to those bathroom bills. I can provide some womanly advice there as well.

I've been sexually assaulted four times. On all four occasions, I was with a man I knew. None of these assaults occurred in a bathroom, and none of the assailants

was transgender. They were simply people who wouldn't take no for an answer.

If you want to prevent sexual assault, dear knight, support comprehensive sexual education and other programs to teach men about consent. Have a talk with your male peers about not treating women like objects. Bullying transgender people will have no effect other than harming an already marginalized group.

In short, stop trying to legislate discrimination in the name of "helping women." Instead, pass laws that actually help women.

OtherWords columnist Jill Richardson is the author of *Recipe for America: Why Our Food System Is Broken and What We Can Do to Fix It*. OtherWords.org.

High-Performing Schools for Every Student

The best gateway to success

BY BRIAN L. PAULING

As the school year winds down, one can't help but think of graduations and where and how students will embark upon the next phase of their lives. Unfortunately, the opportunities for far too many will be limited because of disparities in graduation rates and in opportunities for students at high-performing schools compared with their counterparts at low-performing schools.

Although U.S. high school

graduation rates have significantly improved, U.S. Department of Education statistics show that African-American and Hispanic/Latino students are still

graduating 5 to 10 points behind the national average. Further, students from low-income families are graduating at a rate that's 14.4 percentage points below that of their peers from wealthier backgrounds.

For students to be competitive in post-secondary education and career, they have to be properly prepared. Whether competing for admission to college or entering a career, the student graduating from the high-performing school invariably has the advantage over the

one from the low-performing school. And although each may have a diploma in hand, the student from a low-performing school will more times than not require remedial courses and start behind the curve when trying to achieve long-term success.

100 Black Men of America, Inc. strongly believes the remedy to this situation is advocating for and demanding high-performing schools for all students — and particularly African-American and poor students. We feel that high-performing public schools, whether traditional or charter, are the best gateway to higher education. Coupled with strong parental involvement, quality education options — ones that ensure every child has access to the high-performing school best

suited for him or her — will help them achieve long-term career success.

Sadly, many of the nation's low-performing schools are in minority and low-income neighborhoods. Far too many of these public schools have inadequate resources and their classrooms are overcrowded. They often lack the things higher-performing schools take for granted — experienced teachers, counselors, special education services, current-edition textbooks, and access to technology, to name a few — and their students suffer. When those conditions are allowed to continue, students' paths can deviate from higher education and career to paths of overwhelming struggle, economic challenge and potentially

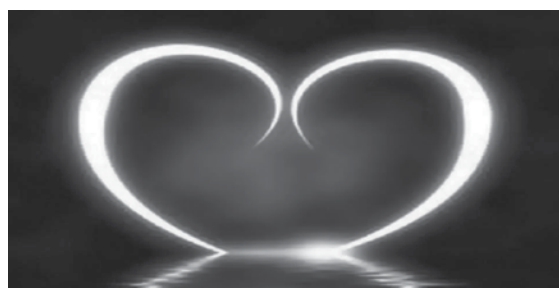
prison.

This is why we must implore our school administrators on the neighborhood, district, city, state and national levels to do their level best to make public education more equitable in every school. In a Washington Post article, former Education Secretary Arne Duncan called on cities and states to rethink their current incarceration practices and proposed funneling an estimated \$15 billion in savings from incarcerations to substantially raise teacher pay in high-poverty schools. He reasoned that higher salaries could attract better teachers to low-performing schools where the help is most needed.

"With a move like this, we'd not just make a bet on education over incarceration, we'd signal the beginning of a long-range effort to pay our nation's teachers what they are worth," Duncan said. "That sort of investment wouldn't just make teachers and struggling communities feel more valued. It would have ripple effects on our economy and on our civic life."

He gets it. We want to make sure everybody else gets it as well. High-performing schools are the best gateway to success. When our children have access to high-performing schools, it exponentially increases their chances to achieve their full potential.

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