

WCSAP Responds: Op-ed in Tacoma News Tribune

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(<http://www.thenewstribune.com/opinion/op-ed/article62721582.html> (link is external))

We all have a responsibility to end sexual assault. Denying transgender people their civil rights is not the way to do that. As the leading anti-sexual violence organization in Washington State, we support public policies that promote and protect the civil rights and human dignity of all. For over ten years, the Washington State Law Against Discrimination has protected people from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. This is not a new rule.

The HRC rule does not supersede the laws that make sexual violence a criminal act in the State of Washington. Sexual assault, sexual harassment, trafficking, voyeurism, etc. are crimes whether they happen on a college campus, within the home, while incarcerated, or in a locker room. If you are harassed in a public bathroom, you can report, regardless of the gender identity of the harasser.

We wish to clarify that the HRC rule provides that people who identify as women, including transgender women, may use the restroom that corresponds to their gender identity. A person is not required to have had medical intervention or surgery to be protected by the rule. The purpose of the HRC rule is not to allow men who identify as men, to freely access women's public restrooms.

Yes, women are raped every 2 minutes, and the majority of these assaults are committed by men. However, the vast majority of men do not commit sexual assault. Leading researchers, including Dr. David Lisak, have found that a small number of men each commit multiple acts of sexual violence.<sup>1</sup> This is a horrific social issue we have worked on for decades and have heard little about from the broader community before the HRC rule. However, these statistics are not specific to restrooms. People who experience sexual assault are overwhelmingly victimized by someone known to them as opposed to a stranger, wherever the violence occurs.<sup>2</sup> Limiting access to locker rooms based on sex characteristics does not prevent sexual violence, as we have learned in cases such as Penn State.<sup>3</sup>

Anti-violence organizations are leading the nation in creating inclusive programs and ending discrimination against transgender people because we decided as a field not to leave any survivor behind. In her Feb. 22 *Your Voice* (link is external), Angela Connolly wrote, "The comfort of .3 percent cannot trump the safety and civil rights of the rest." We disagree. It is our civic responsibility to protect the rights of those who are marginalized in our communities, who are most affected by sexual violence and also experience the highest rates of violence in public bathrooms.<sup>4</sup> Every person has the right to freedom from fear and violence and to live openly in all of their identities.

To truly address the societal harm of sexual violence, we must dig deep to address the root causes of violence. Instead of segregation, let's turn our efforts toward early intervention and violence prevention. It is crucial that we prioritize building protective factors for young people and challenging social norms that allow for sexual violence to go unchecked or unchallenged. When community members work together to hold perpetrators accountable and we intervene earlier, we are truly able to start making this shift toward preventing sexual violence. It is up to all of us to listen to and believe

survivors when they disclose to you. Be a part of the solution by getting involved in your community's efforts to combat sexual violence and support survivors.

If you or someone you know has experienced sexual violence, please visit [www.wcsap.org/find-help](http://www.wcsap.org/find-help) to locate a community sexual assault program in Washington State.

1 <http://www.davidlisak.com/wp-content/uploads/pdf/RepeatRapeinUndetectedR...> (link is external)

2 [http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/nisvs\\_executive\\_summary-a.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/nisvs_executive_summary-a.pdf) (link is external)

3 <http://www.wcsap.org/lessons-penn-state>

4 <http://forge-forward.org/wp-content/docs/bathroom-talking-points-anti-vi...>