

Texas state rep. gives powerful testimony on the history of bathroom laws transcript

I have been a member of this society during a period of time in the history of this state and in this country when we had separate but equal, and I remember those days. I remember bathrooms being white colored. I was living through an era not only in American history but also in Texas history. Bathrooms divided us then, and they divide us now. America has long recognized that separate but equal is not equal at all.

I can tell you, as an African American, how deeply I felt discriminated against because of the color of my skin and my ethnicity. Those of you probably don't have those feelings because you have not had the privilege of walking in my shoes. But I can tell you, ladies and gentlemen, I hope you never have to walk in those shoes—never, never.

I can also tell you that separate restrooms for transgender kids, which is what we would be discussing with this bill, are also based on fear. There is a case currently before the United States Supreme Court that highlights the history of how discrimination has been used to divide us. I would like to read to you, if you would be so kind, a little bit about that.

Not so long ago, bathroom facilities were designated as "colored only" and "white only." A key lesson from that painful and ignoble era is that while white-only restroom barriers may have seemed like minor inconveniences or insignificant sources of embarrassment to some, they were, in fact, a source of profound indignity that inflicted deep and indelible harm on individuals of both races and on society at large.

This indisputable tradition of state and local governments trying to inject fear or hostility toward a disfavored group of people into laws requiring their physical separation from others should encourage this court to view with skepticism the rationales proffered by local officials here.

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