

DC Special Liaison Unit Officers Speak to Second Friday Transgender Community Group

By Ann Murdoch



Acting Lieutenant Brett Parsons & Sergeant Jessica Hawkins

On January 13, 2017, District of Columbia Metropolitan Police Department acting lieutenant Brett Parson Sergeant, manager of the District's Special Liaison Division, and Sergeant Jessica Hawkins, supervisor of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Liaison Unit (LGBTLU) attended a meeting of the Second Friday Peer Support Group for transgender people, parents and allies.

The two emphasized that the District has very clear public accommodation laws that explicitly state that everybody has a right to use public accommodations in accordance with one's own gender identity. "It doesn't matter what stage of transition you are in, it doesn't matter what your birth certificate or your driver's license says, it doesn't matter what your DNA says," Hawkins said. If a person is uncomfortable using a restroom when another person is in it, the uncomfortable person can simply wait a few minutes for the other person to finish and leave the restroom Hawkins added.

Parson said that the best thing one can say in such a situation is, "I identify as female (or male), and I have a right to use this restroom." He said, "We train cops that anyone can use any bathroom. We look at behavior. If there's criminal behavior, we prosecute." Hawkins added, "The main thing I want (transgender people) to know is, DC's still a safe place for trans people. It's going to remain a safe place."

Hawkins said that even with the LGBTLU's efforts to educate law enforcement officers, some are misinformed of the District's nondiscrimination laws. "One thing the security officer said was, "That law didn't pass here yet." Because of all the bathroom bills, there is a mis-perception that people can't use the restroom corresponding to their gender identity in DC Hawkins added.

In short, Hawkins and Parsons said the best way to handle an incident in the District is to "comply and call us."

For more information on the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Liaison Unit, see the Metropolitan Police Department's Special Liaison Unit's website at <https://mpdc.dc.gov/page/special-liaison-division>.