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Start-up partners with District of Columbia to expand access to restrooms with locally developed smart Thrones

WASHINGTON (March 7, 2024) – Washington, DC has [only one public restroom per 10,000 people](#). Consequently, large swaths of the District’s neighborhoods have no place to find relief. Grocery stores, coffee shops and other local businesses are a popular option, but reliance on retail for public amenities incurs costs to local businesses and can [exacerbate equity issues](#) facing the District’s diverse residents and visitors.

To address this unmet need, the District has taken concrete steps to increase access to public restrooms. The DC Public Restroom Pilot Program, initiated this spring by Councilmember Brianne Nadeau, will be implemented by [Throne Labs](#) (“Throne”), a DC-area startup that has developed a twenty-first century approach to the public restroom. District residents may have already used a Throne prototype as early as 2022 at the Downtown Holiday Market, or more recently at Yards Park, where Thrones have been used more than 22,000 times since March 2023.

“Ensuring safe, clean, access to public restrooms for our residence and visitors is a huge priority of mine. I’m thrilled that we found a partner who can help the district grow our public restroom program efficiently,” Nadeau said. “This program is a service for anyone who needs access to public restrooms – pregnant people, people experiencing homelessness, residents, visitors, and others.”

When Throne CEO, Fletcher Wilson, and his co-founders started Throne, they looked at cities across the nation to disrupt the public restroom status quo. “My G.I. system is my worst system,” notes Wilson. “I’ve felt the stress of needing a bathroom and not knowing where to go in many cities, and DC leaders were among the earliest to talk inclusively about the need for bathrooms. We’re excited to join forces with the District to make meaningful progress towards better bathroom access.”

Thrones use technology and behavioral science to remain sparkling clean. Users open the door of the bathroom with a unique ID, either by sending a text message or using a free Throne Tap Card distributed by community partners to people without reliable access to a phone. After they do their business, users are asked to provide cleanliness ratings that inform operations about the status of each Throne. Historical ratings are used to schedule cleanings when they are most needed. When special attention is needed at a location Throne can use the ratings in real time to route members of their locally employed cleaning team to resolve the issue and keep the

bathroom clean and sanitary for subsequent users. If necessary, each Throne can be shut down remotely.

Over the past year, Throne has delighted park visitors at Yards Park in the District and in DMV communities including Hyattsville, Fairfax, Montgomery Parks and Mount Rainier. The company also operates in partnership with LA Metro in Los Angeles, where Thrones and their accountability technology have stood up to some of the toughest locations at Downtown LA transit stations without requiring restroom attendants.

While a smartphone is not necessary to use a Throne, would-be-users can find the nearest Throne with the [Throne Bathroom Network App](#) on the Apple App Store or Google Play.

The DC Public Restroom Pilot Program provides funding for up to ten Thrones around the District from March through September 2024, with the option to extend into 2025. Success will be measured through community surveys and data collected throughout the pilot period on a multitude of metrics including average uses per day, user-generated cleanliness ratings, and uptime/availability. Initial locations identified by the Pilot Program include Columbia Heights Plaza area, Oxon Run Park, H & 8th NE, the Dupont Circle area, and Downtown DC. The District and Throne are currently engaging stakeholders for input on specific placements and secure appropriate approvals to place the Thrones in public space.

Thrones are fully portable and can be placed or picked up quickly, making them ideal for this pilot and dynamic cities where needs can shift with seasons and growth. “We’re data-driven geeks and work with our municipal partners to optimize placement locations,” says Jessica Heinzelman, COO and co-founder of Throne. “We look at use volume, operational logs, and user feedback to determine if a Throne is delivering anticipated value and adapt. This is simply not possible with traditional brick and mortar restrooms that, if poorly placed, can go underutilized or become a net negative contributor to the community.”

Results will be shared transparently throughout the pilot on the [DC Public Restrooms](#) website. DC Public Restrooms is a local advocacy group that has been involved in assessing the suitability of various public restroom solutions for the District of Columbia.

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