

Transvestite bathrooms may become law in Brazilian city

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RIO DE JANEIRO, Brazil -- For most, it's a choice of the men's room or the women's. A Brazilian city is trying to give an option to those who don't fit easily into either category.

A bill passed by the Nova Iguacu city council this week would require nightclubs, shopping malls, movie theaters and large restaurants to provide a third type of bathroom for transvestites.

Mayor Lindberg Farias will decide whether to make it a law.

"A lot of lawmakers didn't want to deal with this issue, but it's a serious problem in society," said Councilman Carlos Eduardo Moreira.

Unwanted in either washroom

Moreira, a 32-year-old policeman on leave from the force, said he got the idea when dozens of transvestites showed up for a samba show.

"It was a real problem. The women didn't feel comfortable having them in the ladies' room, and the men didn't want them in their bathroom either," said Moreira, the father of two children. "I'm not doing this for my own benefit."

He said the "alternative bathrooms" could also be used by men or women who didn't mind sharing space with transvestites.

Moreira said there are nearly 28,000 transvestites in Nova Iguacu, a poor city of about 800,000 on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro.

Gays split on issue

Moreira denied that the cost of building a third bathroom would be a big problem for restaurant or club owners. "It requires an initial investment, but after that, the establishment will end up making more money because it will have a larger public. And transvestites like to spend," he said.

The issue has divided gay groups; some feared it could segregate gays, while others said it recognized a problem.

"At first we were against the law, but after some discussion we decided we had to support it," said Eugenio Ibiapino dos Santos, a founder of the Pink Triangle Association.