

**Testimony in Support of SB0622/HB0711 Income Tax – Subtraction Modification –
Donations to Diaper Banks and Other Charitable Entities**

Phoebe Evans Letocha
604 Stoneleigh Rd
Baltimore MD 21212
PAEL73@yahoo.com

Dear House Ways and Means Committee Members,

I'm writing as a resident of district 42A, represented by both Delegate Cathi Forbes and Senator Chris West, and as the volunteer Period Project Coordinator for the Student Support Network.ⁱ Our organization's mission is to improve the lives of Baltimore County students living in poverty by providing food, other basic necessities, and advocacy support. We strongly support HB0711, cross filed as SB0622 the Income Tax – Subtraction Modification – Donations to Diaper Banks and Other Charitable Entities.

Our organization recognizes the impact that that diaper need has on families' ability to meet the hygienic needs of their babies and the impact of period poverty or the lack of access to menstrual products has on our student's ability to attend school, both remotely and in person. Student Support Network recently became a member of the Alliance for Period Supplies, a national organization working to ensure that individuals in need have access to essential period products required to participate fully in daily life. APS is affiliated with the National Diaper Bank Network, which estimates that 1 in 3 families in the US experience diaper need. Children can't attend daycare if families don't have diapers for their child, causing parents, usually the mother to miss work. According to the Alliance for Period Supplies nationally about 1 in 4 teens have missed class and 1 in 4 women have missed work due to lack of access to period supplies.ⁱⁱ

Pre-pandemic we ran comfort closets in 12 Baltimore County Public Schools, where students can come to receive food and essential hygiene items that they can take home that enable them to attend school by meeting their nutritional and hygienic needs beyond what schools provide. In Maryland 37% of female students in public school grades 7 to 12 attend Title 1 eligible schools and 40% of middle and high school students receive free or reduced-price meals. Over 50,000 students (nearly 44% of all students) qualify for Free and Reduced Price Meals in Baltimore County Public Schools. Public benefits programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) benefits do not cover the cost of purchasing diapers or period supplies.

Since March 2020 when Student Support Network began our weekly community based food and essential items distributions, we have distributed close to half a million individual period products, in the form of pads, tampons and liners packaged into period cycle packs for families in need. Half of these period supplies have been from in kind donations and half are purchase with funds donated to our organization. While we have received grants that supply the most of the food that we distribute each week, all of our diapers and period supplies come from

donations. We estimate that the value of the period supplies we distributed in 2020 is over \$56,000 and the value of our diapers at over \$85,000. Each week at our 3 distribution sites, we serve between 4000-5000 individuals, who line up to 3 hours ahead of the start of distributions in over 500 cars, many picking up for multiple families. Right now our budget for diapers means that half the families who need diapers don't receive them because we run out halfway through a 2 hour distribution. Every week we see the joy and gratitude when we can provide a mother with diapers for her baby and the disappointment when we have to tell the next mother that we have run out this week. This bill will help diaper distribution programs like ours serve more families. It will keep more babies happy and healthy in clean diaper rather than having them risk infection, rashes, and abuse due to the stress of not having a clean diaper.

In Baltimore County, several Delegates have actively participated in our distributions sites including district 42 Delegate Cathi Forbes and Michelle Guyton who have led distribution sites as well as District 8 Delegate Harry Bhandari who has volunteered with his high school daughter to distribute our diapers and period packs. I'm pleased to see that this bill has bipartisan sponsorship within our 2 chambers.

Our efforts to combat period poverty in Baltimore County during the pandemic have been youth initiated, starting with my daughter Abby's Girl Scout Gold Award project and continued by other Towson High school girls after she left for college. These students have built a network of over 50 female middle and high school student volunteers who assemble packs of period products that have been donated by community members or purchased with funds donated to our organization. These girls understand the impact of period poverty and understand the impact lack of access to period supplies has on students' ability to attend class. They know what it is like to go to the school bathroom, discover that their period has started and realize they don't have access to period supplies where they need it. They have wadded up toilet paper as a temporary measure, only to worry that they will leak blood on their cloths. They have put their health a risk by keeping a tampon in longer than recommended. They have had to ask peers and teachers for a pad or tampon when they didn't have one. Teachers report that they regularly keep a stash of these products at their desks that they purchase themselves. Students are missing school and denied an education because of lack of access to menstrual products.

Similar to our period product drive, our diaper program was greatly expanded through the work of a local Gil Scout who started a diaper donation drive. These youth driven initiatives raised awareness of diaper need and period poverty. We've had more success in securing donations of period products to meet the weekly needs of our families than we have of diapers which are much more expensive. A case a diapers which typically lasts 1 week can cost \$25-35 compared to \$6-7 for a monthly supply of period products.

Qualified charities like ours often struggle to receive adequate donations of diaper and period supplies which are among items most requested by women. This bill will benefit our students experiencing homelessness or income insecurity by incentivizing the donation of diapers, period supplies and the funds to purchase them to organizations like ours who meet families' basic needs. It will help us bring dignity to our families by providing them the hygienic supplies they

need to go to school, work and daycare without shame or embarrassment and remedy an impediment to equal access to education and the workplace.

Thank you,

Phoebe Evans Letocha

ⁱ <https://studentsupportnetwork.org/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.allianceforperiodsupplies.org/index> For Maryland State factsheet see [https://cdn.b12.io/client_media/HJ1wIVtI/e5c8dfb4-95f9-11ea-a54f-0242ac110003-Maryland APS Period Poverty Fact Sheet 052020.pdf](https://cdn.b12.io/client_media/HJ1wIVtI/e5c8dfb4-95f9-11ea-a54f-0242ac110003-Maryland_APS_Period_Poverty_Fact_Sheet_052020.pdf)