

January 27, 2021
Ways and Means Committee
Testimony in Support of House Bill 205 (Delegate Reznik)
Public Schools – Provision of Menstrual Hygiene Products – Requirement

Chair Kaiser and Members of the Committee:

My name is Ally Hirsch, and I am a 9th grade Algebra 1 teacher at Mervo High School in Baltimore City. This testimony is in strong support of House Bill 205, as I have first hand experience witnessing the devastating impact that the lack of access to menstrual hygiene products has on my student's learning, attendance, confidence, and health. With that in mind, I urge you to support this legislation that guarantees free menstrual hygiene products via dispensers in the restrooms at all public elementary, middle, and high schools. Currently, five other states, California, Illinois, New Hampshire, New York, and, most recently, Virginia, require schools to provide free menstrual products in restrooms at schools. Passing this bill would make Maryland the sixth state to remove barriers for students accessing menstrual hygiene products at schools and ensure that every student can learn and participate in all of their daily school activities, whether or not they are menstruating.

Considering the average age of a person's first period is 12, and nearly 200,000 of Maryland's female K-12 students are 12 or older, on any given school day in Maryland, there are tens of thousands of public-school students likely menstruating. According to [data](#) from the Maryland State Department of Education, for SY 18-19, more than 40% of those students qualified for free or reduced-price school meals. That percentage has likely only increased due to the current COVID-19 pandemic. This data is noteworthy, as financial insecurity makes it far more likely that students will miss school and instruction due to a lack of proper hygiene products to get through the school day.

A [survey](#) titled "State of the Period," that surveyed 1,000 students aged 13 to 19, found that:

- 61% of students have worn a tampon or pad for more than four hours because they did not have access to menstrual products at school, putting them at risk for infection or Toxic Shock Syndrome, a dangerous complication of certain types of bacteria.
- 84% of students have either missed class time or know someone who missed class time because they did not have access to period products
- 66% of students do not want to be at school when they are on their period due to lack of access to menstrual products
- 20% of students have struggled to afford menstrual products or were not able to purchase them at all

With all of those statistics in mind, the refusal to pass policies providing free access to menstrual hygiene products for our young people in schools is an explicit declaration from

elected legislators that the attendance, academic outcomes, and health of students who are menstruating are not a primary concern.

I have seen too many of my students affected by the lack of access to menstrual products, and lack of access to menstrual products at school is a severe problem all across the state. Luckily, there is a very solvable solution - we need to ensure free menstrual hygiene products in the restrooms at every public school in Maryland, and we can do exactly that by passing House Bill 205. With so many K-12 students' negatively impacted by the lack of access to menstrual products at school, it is essential for the academic success and health of our young people to urge a favorable vote on HB0205.