



**Testimony for the House Ways and Means Committee
January 27, 2021**

HB 205 – Public Schools – Provision of Menstrual Hygiene Products

FAVORABLE

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The ACLU of Maryland supports HB 205, which would require public schools to provide menstrual hygiene products at no cost to students. **Menstrual equity is a clear issue of gender equity, economic justice, and public health.** Menstruation should be treated like any other natural bodily function, as it will affect over half the population in their lifetimes. Young women and those who menstruate need easy and affordable access to basic hygiene products to be physically and mentally healthy. Menstrual products in school bathrooms should be regulated no differently than toilet paper, for instance, and the lack of reliable access to such a vital health need is gender discriminatory.

This burden is even starker for students living below the poverty line. A monthly supply of menstrual hygiene products can be cost-prohibitive for low wage-earning families. These students are disproportionately impacted by a lack of menstrual products, and bear most of the medical and psychological impacts when going without them.

When students cannot afford or do not have reliable access to menstrual products, they are forced to reuse products, use them for longer periods of time, or go without, risking their health and wellbeing. Physical risks include developing infections that can lead to cervical cancer and infertility. Especially in the early stages of puberty, girls often feel self-conscious even when menstrual products are readily available. The embarrassment of asking for basic products they need, or struggling when forced to go without them makes it more difficult to concentrate in the classroom, and may cause them to skip school altogether, falling behind educationally and socially, and participating less than fully in school.

The ACLU-MD advocates strongly for personal bodily autonomy. Students should not face additional burdens simply because of their gender, especially when their bodies and minds are growing inside and outside the classroom. HB 205 would help lessen this burden for young students who menstruate, creating a more equitable school environment for all students.

For the foregoing reasons, we urge a favorable report on HB 205.