

Samantha Handwerk Menstrual Equality Bill Testimony

My name is Samantha Handwerk, and I live in Baltimore City. I am asking this committee to support House Bill 208 which will fund basic medical supplies to children across the state of Maryland. I attended a Baltimore City Public School for 5 years, from 4th to 8th grade. I clearly remember the day when I first got my period. I asked permission to go to the bathroom during 6th-grade lunch, and once I got to the bathroom I realized I had blood in my underwear. Not sure what to do, I remembered my mom telling me that when I got my period I should go to the nurse and ask for help. I awkwardly asked my middle school principal if I could go to the nurse's office, and I was allowed to go. Walking up to the nurse's office, I was scared, and when I got there a line of students stood in front of me for various medical needs. Not wanting to ask in front of everyone, I ran back to the bathroom and shoved a pile of balled-up toilet paper in my underwear to hopefully soak up the blood until I got home. Even after my first encounter with my period, the awkwardness didn't stop. When it would surprise me at school or I would forget a tampon, I would have to go around and quietly ask my friends if any of them had a tampon or pad until I got lucky. While periods are not something to be ashamed of, forcing menstruators to go on a wild-goose chase each time they menstruate is not okay. It creates a sense of shame and secrecy around an everyday medical need. Menstrual products are an essential part of human life. Just like food is free in Baltimore Public Schools, period products should be too. Now that I attend a school that provides period products in the restrooms, I don't feel the stress and shame of asking other girls for period products, I don't get distracted from valuable class time to take care of a natural human process. Having period products in public school restrooms not only gives girls comfort and privacy but also will help them stay focused on their academic success, to do what they came to school for. As well, funding this essential aspect of children's lives will help to mitigate the socioeconomic inequity that we see across all generations, even our youngest. Right now I run a group called Happy Period Baltimore. We distribute menstrual products to anyone who menstruates and lives under the poverty line in Baltimore. Through this work, I have learned that annually, a period will cost a menstruator \$120 minimum (does not include the cost of birth control, heating pad, underwear, etc.). 12% of children in Maryland live below the poverty line. 34% of children in Maryland live in single-parent homes, most of which are headed by women. 10% of women living in Maryland live below the poverty line. These households and families, who most likely attend a Maryland Public School, do not have the money to buy menstrual products, an essential human need. Taking the step to provide students with free menstrual products, could be one step in helping to close the enormous wealth gap present in Maryland. I am asking that you please make menstrual products available in public school restrooms to allow schools to support and educate the whole child, not just part of them.

Thank you for your time.

-Samantha Handwerk