



HB0133 – Public Schools – Provision of Feminine Hygiene Products

Presented to the Hon. Anne R. Kaiser and Members of the House Ways and Means Committee

February 7, 2019 1:00pm

POSITION: SUPPORT

NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland **urges the House Ways and Means Committee to make a favorable report on HB0133**, Public Schools - Provision of Feminine Hygiene Products.

Our organization is an advocate for reproductive health, rights, and justice. Among our goals is promoting dignity of all women and girls regarding their menstrual health. Menstruation is a natural and unavoidable element of an average woman's life that starts roughly at 10 and continues to the age of 50. There are students at Maryland public schools in need of free access to menstrual hygiene products so that they can continue their education without interruption. Being without these essential products can lead to embarrassing situations, heightened stress, and lack of concentration which may lead some students to miss school, affecting them both academically and socially, as they may be less inclined to take part in their school communities and actively participate in the classroom.

The current absence of access to free feminine hygiene products primarily impacts those students who cannot afford to purchase them. Approximately 11.7% of Maryland youth under 18 had incomes below the poverty line in 2018 according to Talk Poverty¹. This means that a significant proportion of Maryland's 6th to 12th graders live in a situation of poverty. Given that menstrual hygiene products are expensive to buy means that a number of students cannot reliably use these products on a monthly basis. The cheapest box of sanitary napkins at CVS pharmacy costs \$2.99² before tax, which is about 13.6 cents per pad. As the average menstruation lasts from 3 to 5 days and sanitary products have to be changed every few hours, this means that the costs add up and are too great for some students to pay. This can force students to choose between purchasing menstrual hygiene products and other necessities for school.

The monthly cycle for young women is usually irregular which means one's period can come as a surprise making preparedness difficult. These products should be changed regularly, but if students do not have enough, they will be forced to overuse the limited products they have, or use other items such as rolled up toilet paper from the school restroom or wadded rags in place of proper products. The consequences of poor menstrual hygiene include bacterial vaginitis, urinary tract infections, and potentially fatal toxic shock syndrome. Barriers to accessing these products increases the risk of having to go to the doctor or an emergency room for treatment, an unanticipated expense which could have been avoided as well as time spent away from school that can further impact studies.

We strongly support students having free access to menstrual hygiene products at school. Menstruating without proper sanitary care is degrading, stressful, and unhealthy. Having schools provide these resources can help youth focus better in classrooms and realize their education goals. For these reasons, NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland **urges a favorable committee report on HB0133**. Thank you for your time and consideration.

¹ Talk Poverty. (2019). *Maryland Report - 2018 - Talk Poverty*. [online] Available at: <https://talkpoverty.org/state-year-report/maryland-2018-report/> [Accessed 29 Jan. 2019].

² Cvs.com. (2019). *CVS Health Ultra Thin Pads Regular*. [online] Available at: <https://www.cvs.com/shop/cvs-health-ultra-thin-pads-regular-prodid-688186?skuid=688186> [Accessed 29 Jan. 2019].