



HB0757 – Local Health Departments and Community Action Agencies – Feminine Hygiene Products
Presented to the Hon. Shane Pendergrass and Members of the Health & Government Operations Committee
February 23, 2021 1:30p.m.

POSITION: SUPPORT

NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland urges Members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee to issue a **favorable report on HB0757 - Local Health Departments and Community Action Agencies – Feminine Hygiene Products**, sponsored by Delegate Heather Bagnall.

Our organization is an advocate for reproductive health, rights, and justice. As part of our efforts to protect reproductive freedom for all Marylanders, we work to ensure every individual has the right to decide if, when, and how to form their families, and to parent in good health, in safety, and with dignity. In doing so, we strongly support offering free menstrual products in local health departments and community action agencies to help protect sexual and reproductive health. In Maryland, 9% of residents live below the poverty line with more than 20% of Baltimore City living in poverty¹ and over 220,000 low-income Maryland residents making use of the 17 Community Action Agencies in our state². In the United States, a year's supply of menstrual products can cost more than \$70³. When people experiencing poverty must choose between necessities such as food and rent with purchasing menstrual products, it is referred to as period poverty.

Research on period poverty shows lack of access leads to misuse of menstrual products, such as wearing a tampon for longer than the recommended number of hours or using unsafe alternatives like dishrags or paper towels³. These practices can cause genital tract infection, urinary tract infection, toxic shock syndrome, and other health issues. Lack of access to menstrual products can also lead to people missing school or work. A 2019 report in *the Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology* found that two-thirds of women living in poverty could not afford such products the previous year and one-fifth could not afford them on a monthly basis. According to a 2019 national survey, two-thirds of teens feel stressed about inadequate access to menstrual hygiene products, 1 in 5 teens have struggled to afford products, and 84% of students have missed class or skipped school due to lack of access to these products⁴.

As well as increasing health and gender equity in Maryland, access to menstrual products helps to fight racial disparities related to period poverty. Research shows that Black and Hispanic girls get their periods significantly younger than non-Hispanic Asian and white girls⁵. In Maryland, race and socioeconomic status intersect—13.6% of Black Marylanders live below the poverty line¹. This means that Black and Hispanic females are both more likely to experience period poverty and likely to experience it at a younger age. In order to achieve gender equity in the State of Maryland, we need to increase access to menstrual products for all residents, especially those experiencing poverty.

By providing feminine hygiene products in health departments and community action agencies, this legislation will give Marylanders experiencing period poverty the opportunity to have safe and healthy menstrual hygiene. For these reasons, NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland **urges a favorable committee report on HB0757**. Thank you for your time and consideration.

- ¹Maryland | Persons in Poverty, percent. (2019) *United State Census Bureau*. [online] Available at: <https://www.census.gov/search-results.html?searchType=web&cssp=SERP&q=maryland%20poverty> [Accessed 16 Feb. 2021]
- ²Collective Impact. (2019) *Maryland Community Action Partnership*. [online] Available at: <http://www.maryland-cap.org/impact.aspx> [Accessed 16 Feb. 2021]
- ³Five Facts About Period Poverty. (2017) *Madeline Boeding, The Borgen Project*. [online] Available at: <https://borgenproject.org/period-poverty/> [Accessed 16 Feb. 2021]
- ⁴State of the Period. (2019) *Commissioned by Thinx & PERIOD*. [online] Available at: https://cdn.shopify.com/s/files/1/0795/1599/files/State-of-the-Period-white-paper_Thinx_PERIOD.pdf?455788 [Accessed 16 Feb. 2021]
- ⁵Deardorff, J., Abrams, B., Ekwaru, J. P., & Rehkopf, D. H. (2014). Socioeconomic status and age at menarche: an examination of multiple indicators in an ethnically diverse cohort. *Annals of epidemiology*, 24(10), 727–733. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annepidem.2014.07.002> [online] Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4170010/> [Accessed 16 Feb. 2021]