

Uma Fox-Menstrual Hygiene Products Access Testimony

Good afternoon honorable members of the Ways and Means Committee. My name is Uma Fox. I am a Montgomery County Resident, a Sophomore at Richard Montgomery High School, the president of MoCo Pride, our county's association of LGBTQ+ students, and the Legislative Affairs Director of our County's Student Government Association. I am here today to voice my support for Delegate Reznick's House Bill 208, which would require every Maryland school district to provide free menstrual hygiene products in school bathrooms.

It's often said that menstruating people are "emotional" on their periods. But with the combination of physical and mental pain we experience every month, not to mention the sheer cost of menstrual supplies, why shouldn't we be? On average, one box of pads or tampons costs seven dollars. Now, that may not seem like much. But for many of Maryland's students, \$7 could mean a lot of other things worth getting emotional about. School lunch for the week. Bus passes and public transport to and from school. Or Notebooks and pencils for class. Many students throughout Maryland cannot afford a basic, monthly necessity for their hygiene and dignity. According to researchers at Obstetrics & Gynecology, 1 in 5 women cannot afford menstrual hygiene products monthly. For many students, a lack of menstrual hygiene access comes down to decisions that should never have to happen: students making the choice between buying food or buying hygiene products. People missing school on their periods or substituting hygienic products with rags, toilet paper, or paper towels that lead to harmful infections. Period poverty is real amongst Marylanders and real amongst our students every day. And now you wonder why we seem 'emotional'? In a state with one of the nation's highest standards of living, menstruating students should have basic rights to their dignity and health. Needed care for a monthly,

biological event that over half the population experiences should not be treated as a luxury for the wealthy. With other issues, a clear trend of inaccessibility has warranted solutions. For instance, when Maryland districts realized students were going home hungry, they created programs to provide food for students on weekends and make open food pantries. Menstrual hygiene products are of equal necessity to food; you cannot opt out of your period. Additionally, in a state where 43.21% of students depend on the Free and Reduced Price Meals program, we see that period poverty is highly likely in our student body and only growing as our FARMS rate increases. And while students can access hygiene products in their nurses' office, this fix is rife with potential for student embarrassment or shame. It is time for an open, just, and dignified solution. We face a crisis in public health when we deny students access to the basic right of being able to privately care for their own bodies. It is time now for a policy that makes menstrual hygiene accessible for all. Because no one should have to choose between a meal and a monthly necessity. No one should have to give up days of their education due to inaccess. And no one should have to relinquish their right to dignity when a solution is feasible and clear. Our sisters, our gender nonbinary siblings and our trans brothers, our school staff, our students, our fellow people, deserve this right to health and dignity in our schools. Thank you.