

Hana O’Looney

Ways and Means Committee Testimony 1/30

Good afternoon esteemed members of the Ways and Means Committee and fellow community members. My name is Hana O’Looney, and I am a sophomore at Richard Montgomery High School, and a board member of the women’s student leadership organization, MoCo EmpowHER in Montgomery County. Today, I am here to testify in support of Delegate Reznick’s House Bill 208, which would finally require every county Board of Education in the state of Maryland to provide feminine hygiene products in bathrooms at no charge to students.

It’s pretty ridiculous that I am giving this testimony today, in the year 2020. Menstrual hygiene, as deemed by the United Nations, is a human right. And an expensive one. A “State of the Period” study commissioned last year by the nonprofit PERIOD found that one in five menstruating teenagers in the U.S. struggles to afford menstrual products or is unable to purchase them at all. So it only follows logically that when menstruating students don’t have access to feminine hygiene products, whether that be as a result of financial hardship or simply a lack of access, we are going to miss class. This may mean texting a friend and waiting in the bathroom for 10 minutes until they are able to miss class and deliver one to us, or it may mean going on an uncomfortable walk across the school to the nurse’s office.

Either way, I can say with absolute certainty that there are elementary, middle, and high school students across the state of Maryland that miss class every day because of a lack of access to menstrual products. This should not be normal. Keeping feminine hygiene products out of our school bathrooms is keeping girls and those who menstruate from getting an equitable education.

And it’s not an impossible task either. California, New York, Illinois, and New Hampshire are just some of the states that have already enacted legislation similar to HB 208. And there have been critics there and in our own state that have said that this bill and others similar to it are too costly, too dangerous, or an infringement on county autonomy. But the success of these states and the unanimous, unquestionable, and undying demand from our menstruating students across Maryland prove that these are just sad excuses for a bill that has serious potential to relieve inequities in our educational system.

Education is a direct investment in our children, and in the future of this great state, and it is imperative that we ensure that there aren’t barriers and paywalls standing in its way. The truth is that right now, menstruating products are a luxury reserved only for the wealthy, and this is preventing students from going to class. Every county in this state has room in their school budget for menstrual and educational equity, and we must enter this new decade knowing that we have done everything we could have to fight for the basic rights of our students. The solution, delegates, is right here in front of us, right now, and there is absolutely no reason that HB 208 should not be passed.