

Menstrual Products in Public Bathrooms Testimony – Bridget Chen  
HB0208 PUBLIC SCHOOLS – PROVISION OF MENSTRUAL HYGIENE PRODUCTS

Presented to the Honorable Anne Kaiser and Members of the House Ways and Means  
Committee

January 30, 2020 1:00pm

POSITION: SUPPORT

My name is Bridget Chen and I am a recent graduate from Johns Hopkins University. I am a part of Wings, a nonprofit service organization with a mission to improve menstrual health, hygiene, and equity in Baltimore, and for the past year, I had the opportunity to survey the JHU community of their attitudes towards menstrual health needs on campus, and then advocate and plan with my university's administration to get menstrual products in our bathrooms free of cost. I am extremely proud to say that my campus will be installing dispensers in bathrooms filled with products starting from February this year. **With the same hopes here, I am testifying in support of House Bill 208 Public Schools - Provision of Menstrual Hygiene Products.**

Menstruation is a natural process that all women inevitably experience for a sizable duration in their lifetime, but its proper management is unfortunately gated by affordability, accessibility and availability of menstrual products. Some young girls sacrifice attendance and participation in school in order to avoid the discomfort and pain of menstrual cramps, the unavailability of products, and the stigma surrounding dialogue around periods. For school-goers who are part of families that are divided, experiencing homelessness or incarceration, the priorities of meeting menstrual health needs become even more out of range.

From the perspective of a college student, this story is sadly not unfamiliar. Perhaps it is assumed that with age, comes maturity, experience and the ability to deal effectively with periods-- however that is actually not true. With age, high schoolers and college students alike *continually* face challenges--though different from those of their younger counterparts--such as immense hormonal, sleep schedule and activity changes, which ultimately disturb the supposedly very regular menstrual cycle. Unhealthy lifestyle habits then run by unnoticed due to the hushed dialogue around periods and lead to irregular and unpredictable periods, that if left improperly managed for too long, can lead to disease. Furthermore, menstruators are not protected by any sort of health policy guidelines for seeing a gynecologist, much less given the funds to do so, which makes sometimes being a girl or having a parent of a daughter, seem like a luxury that many can't afford. Even when one goes for an examination, medical screening to detect these deleterious diseases are ineffective, often leaving these conditions to go undiagnosed for upwards of 10 years.

I would like to emphasize that much like the experience of getting her first period as a young girl, older menstruators, like myself, still face a lot of the same problems when products are unavailable: there is a wave of anxiety when attempting to furtively hide a product under folds of clothing as we stumble our way to the nearest restroom. Menstrual cramps disrupt our ability to focus and participate in class, which hampers performance and ultimately career prospects. This may seem dramatic, but I have experienced this first-hand, and unfortunately, I

have peers who have even taken leaves of absence due to menstrual health illnesses, with the symptom of having unceasing and debilitating menstrual pains.

Today, although we can't immediately cure illnesses with the passing of a bill, I am simply asking you consider solving the broader problem, a problem of stigma around periods that is gated by inaccessibility to products. With that step taken, we will be able to more naturally address the underlying issues that are currently concealed by this stigma and shame, and hopefully, transform the self-conscious journey to the bathroom or the journey to the nurse's office from a walk of shame into a walk of simply getting basic needs met - just like any other trip to the restroom.

Thank you for your time, effort and consideration of supporting this bill.

Bridget Chen

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