



# HOMELESS PERSONS REPRESENTATION PROJECT, INC.

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## **SUPPORT – HB 208: Public Schools – Provision of Menstrual Hygiene Products**

House Judiciary Committee, January 30, 2020

Testimony of Akyra Brown, Homeless Persons Representation Project, Inc.

*The Homeless Persons Representation Project, Inc. (HPRP) is a non-profit legal services provider that provides free legal representation to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness on legal issues that will lead to an end to homelessness. HPRP's Homeless Youth Initiative serves unaccompanied homeless youth ages 24 and younger. HPRP strongly supports HB 208. The bill will provide K-12 students in public schools with equal access to menstrual products.*

**Equal access to menstrual products in public schools creates a safe and secure environment that is more conducive to learning.** In 2019 43.2% of public school students in Maryland enrolled in the free/reduced-price lunch program.<sup>1</sup> In addition to this the U.S. Department of Education counted 17,892 homeless students from K-12 in its most recent count of homeless students from SY 17-18.<sup>2</sup> This indicates that many K-12 students in Maryland's public schools are from low-income households where they may not have access to basic hygiene necessities such as menstrual products. Not having fundamental necessities creates undue stressors for the youth, and creates an environment in school that is unsafe, uncomfortable, and unfair. Students in such a distressing situation are doubtlessly self-conscious which causes inattention in the classroom and other compounding effects such as: leaving class early to go to the nurse's office or home, missing important class lessons/homework, having to pack another set of clothes, bullying from their peers, etc. Low-income students thus face exclusion in receiving their education due to their unequal access to menstrual products. Providing free menstrual products eliminates barriers to comfortability in public schools. Furthermore, this creates a learning environment that is accommodating to low-income students and creates an equitable learning experience for all students.

**Menstrual products are prohibitively expensive and create more financial barriers for low-income families.** If free menstrual products were provided in schools it would be one less financial stressor for low-income families and students to worry about. Many low-income families must choose between which necessities will be paid for and which ones will be neglected. Often this choice is presented as choosing between larger financial responsibilities such as rent or car payments. However, many low-income families have to choose between seemingly minor necessities such as \$10 worth of groceries or the \$10 box of menstrual pads. Known as the "pink tax", this term describes a widespread form of gender-based discrimination where "women's products" are more expensive than comparable men's products.<sup>3</sup> This ideology needs to be combatted by normalizing menstruation, and treating access to menstrual products as an everyday public health service, much like toilet paper is. This can be done by taking into account that menstruating is a natural process for over half of the world's population, and is a bodily function that cannot be controlled. In understanding menstruation as an everyday bodily function we will end cost-prohibitive and unequal access to menstrual products, increase productivity in schools, and lessen financial burdens for low-income families who are already severely struggling to afford fundamental necessities.

### **HPRP strongly urges the committee to issue a Favorable Report on HB**

Please contact Akyra Brown at [abrown@hprplaw.org](mailto:abrown@hprplaw.org) or 410-685-6589 ext. 15 for additional information.

1. MD STATE DEPT. OF EDUCATION, FREE AND REDUCED PRICE MEAL STATISTICS SY 2018-2019, AVAILABLE AT: <http://marylandpublicschools.org/programs/pages/school-community-nutrition/freereducedpricemealstatistics.aspx>
2. MD STATE DEPT. OF EDUCATION, SCHOOL STATUS DATA, ENROLLED HOMELESS STUDENTS SY 2017-2018, AVAILABLE AT: <https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/edfacts/data-files/school-status-data.html>
3. CANDICE ELLIOT, LISTEN MONEY MATTERS, *THE PINK TAX – THE COST OF BEING A FEMALE CONSUMER*, AVAILABLE AT: <https://www.listenmoneymatters.com/the-pink-tax/>