



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 208

Public Schools – Provision of Menstrual Hygiene Products

House Ways and Means Committee

January 30, 2020

Submitted by Stacey Jefferson and Margo Quinlan, Co-Chairs

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Marylanders Against Poverty

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Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) supports HB 208, which requires local boards of education to ensure that each public school provide, at no charge to students, menstrual products in the restrooms at the school.

Although Maryland has the highest median income in the country, unconscionable numbers of students in our school are living in or near poverty. Over 43% of students in Maryland – nearly 400,000 – qualify for Free and Reduced Price Meals (FARMs), meaning their families are living in or near poverty.¹ Furthermore, over 17,000 of students in our public schools are experiencing homelessness – a number that has been steadily increasing over the past several years.²

Young people living in poverty face unique challenges, including the ability to have dignified, healthy menstrual cycles. On average, individuals can spend anywhere between \$5 and \$10 for a box of tampons and pads, or significantly more for durable products such as menstrual cups. Given that menstruating individuals have approximately 12-13 menstrual cycles a year, the cost of menstrual products quickly add up over time. Unfortunately, access to these products are a substantial challenge for families living in or near poverty. Hygiene products are rarely donated to shelters or food banks, and public assistance - such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, known formally as Food Stamps) and WIC - cannot be used to purchase such products. To save money, individuals living in poverty often rely on make-shift hygiene products such as toilet paper or rags, or use menstrual products for excessive stretches of time, which increases risk for deadly health conditions like toxic shock syndrome. HB 208 will ensure that basic hygiene needs in our schools are covered, and ameliorate situations where low-income families have to make impossible choices on which necessities they can forgo.

A critical component of HB 208 is requiring menstrual products to be available in all schools – including elementary schools. A body of research has demonstrated that – likely due to the daily stresses of living in poverty – low-income children often start puberty earlier than their peers.³ Additionally, students of color often menstruate earlier than their white peers.⁴ Menstrual products are a vital resource, and the equitable availability of these products to menstruating students is imperative.

MAP fully supports efforts to increase the health, safety, and security of people struggling in or near poverty, such as HB 208. **MAP appreciates your consideration and urges the committee to issue a favorable report for HB 208.**

Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) is a coalition of service providers, faith communities, and advocacy organizations advancing statewide public policies and programs necessary to alleviate the burdens faced by Marylanders living in or near poverty, and to address the underlying systemic causes of poverty.

¹ Maryland State Department of Education. (2019). *Free and Reduced-Price Meal Data*

² National Center for Homeless Education. (2018). *Maryland Data*.

<http://profiles.nche.seiservices.com/StateProfile.aspx?StateID=24>

³ Psychological Bulletin. (2004). *Timing of Pubertal Maturation in Girls: An Integrated Life Approach*.

<https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2004-20177-005>

⁴ ibid