



**Montgomery County Community Action Board Testimony in Support of HB588
Community Action Agencies – Provision of Feminine Hygiene Products
Wednesday, March 30, 2022**

TO: The Honorable Delores G. Kelley, Chair; The Honorable Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair; and Members of the Senate Finance Committee

FROM: Tiffany Jones, Chair, Montgomery County Community Action Board

The Montgomery County Community Action Board, the County’s federally designated anti-poverty group, is in full support of HB588 and asks the Committee for a favorable report. Feminine hygiene products place a financial burden on women, especially lower-income women. Distributing feminine hygiene products will help to ensure that more women have access to products that are a necessity not covered by any other public assistance program.

This bill aims to address “period poverty”, which is “the social, economic, political, and cultural barriers to menstrual products, education, and sanitation”¹. This is an often-overlooked challenge for women. A survey of 2,000 women (aged 18–55) found that 49% have faced a lack of access to sanitary products, menstrual hygiene education, toilets, hand washing facilities and/or waste management. Sixty percent of respondents admitted to budgeting in order to afford sanitary items and 79% made sacrifices or gone with less in order to afford their necessities.

The amended bill calls on three Maryland Community Action Agencies to begin distributing feminine hygiene products as part of a pilot program. CAAs, which conduct data-driven community needs assessments to inform planning, are well-positioned to take the lead on this initiative. Each local agency develops an annual Community Action Plan that is approved by the agency’s Board, which include representatives from the public, private, and low-income sectors.

While the Montgomery County Community Action Agency is not included in the pilot program, we hope that this program will be expanded in the years to come to our agency and others since this issue impacts women everywhere. In Montgomery County for example, about 8.5% of women are below the Federal Poverty Level (compared with 6.3% of men). For single mothers with children under 18, the poverty rate jumps to 18.7%.² Furthermore, 31% of women in the County fall below the Self-Sufficiency Standard (compared with 25% of men).³ This means that 31% of women in the County cannot afford basic necessities (housing, food, transportation, etc.) without government assistance.

The cost of feminine hygiene products adds to the financial burden women face. This bill could help, at least in one area, to reduce this burden. We ask that you vote in support of HB588.

¹ <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/period-poverty#what-is-it>

² <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs>

³ <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/OCA/CommunityAction/interactiveSelfSufficiency.html>