



TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE

HB 588: Local Health Departments and Community Action Agencies- Feminine Hygiene Products

POSITION: Support

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The League of Women Voters Maryland supports House Bill 588: Local Health Departments and Community Action Agencies- Feminine Hygiene Products.

The League supports a health care system that ensures equal access to affordable, quality health care- including reproductive health care- for all U.S. residents. The League's "Statement of Position on Meeting Basic Human Needs," adopted and revised in the 1970's and 1980's, stress that persons whose earnings are inadequate have the right to services and materials sufficient to meet their needs for food, shelter, and access to health care.

Menstrual hygiene is a basic human need. "Period poverty," or the inability to afford sanitary products to manage menstrual bleeding, affects women all over the world, **including in Maryland.** Women need to manage their periods with dignity and comfort. The lack of adequate access to period products has a strong negative impact on women's mental health and well-being, as well as their ability to participate in normal activities such as work and school. Without adequate access to these essential items, families can be forced to choose between buying tampons and pads or buying food or medicine, as state and federal public health and nutritional assistance programs such as WIC or SNAP do not cover the cost of menstrual products.

Feminine hygiene products are medical necessities. Per the Maryland Tax Code covering Medical Supplies and Hygienic Aids, feminine hygiene products are exempt from sales tax, as they are considered medical products. The federal CARES Act, signed into law in March 2020, expanded flexible spending accounts (FSA's) and Health Savings Accounts (HSA's) to cover period products- also recognizing them as medical products.

Period poverty is a public health issue. Lack of adequate access to menstrual products can increase the risk of serious infections such as toxic shock, as women can extend the use of pads or tampons past the recommended time period, or be forced to use unsanitary materials such as rags, socks, paper towels, toilet paper or newspaper to manage menstrual bleeding.

Access to menstrual hygiene products is an equity and human rights issue. Period poverty disproportionately affects poor women and women of color. Period poverty is demeaning. All Marylanders should be able to manage their periods with dignity, knowing they have adequate access to safe menstrual products.

House Bill 588 would make feminine hygiene products available free of charge to Medicaid recipients. The financial impact would be mitigated by the decreased amount of Medicaid dollars spent on entirely preventable infections caused by lack of adequate access to this basic need.

The League urges the committee to give a favorable report to House Bill 588.