



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

March 30, 2022

HB588 - Community Action Agencies - Provision of Feminine Hygiene Products

Good afternoon Madam Chair, Mr. Vice Chair, and members of the Finance and Budget and Taxation Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you about House Bill 588.

Period poverty is a real issue for many women and girls. When times get tough for low income families, many often have to make difficult choices and sacrifices just to survive. When forced to cut back, people will choose to provide food for their family and diapers for their baby before considering spending their limited capital on menstrual products. Local and State-run food and resource pantries have seen drastic increases in the number of families who rely on them in the last year. One of the hardest products to keep in stock is menstrual and feminine hygiene products due to the high demand and high cost to the providers to supply them. While there are state and federal programs such as WIC and SNAP for food, formula, and medications, currently there are no financial resources to aid in the purchase of menstrual products. Limited access to menstrual products can lead to lost work and wages, adverse health effects, and impact the autonomy and mental wellbeing of those in need.

Additionally, populations in need of menstrual products are overwhelmingly communities of color. Lack of access to these essential health products is not just a health issue but one of racial equity. Menstrual health should not be a luxury for those who can afford it. HB 588 will provide for greater access to menstrual products for low-income populations.

In order to ensure this program is implemented seamlessly and effectively in the communities that need it most, we are requesting a pilot program for three years as an initial launch. It is our hope that a pilot will allow Community Action Agencies and Local Health Departments to examine the feasibility, cost, and functionality for a large-scale program across the entire state.

HB588 was passed out of the House with some additional clean-up amendments. First, because local health departments have been overwhelmed with the COVID-19 pandemic and lack the space and capacity for menstrual product distribution, I have opted to remove them from the mandate while keeping it clear that they will work with community agencies to make this program a success. Further, I have expanded on the initial budget language to clarify the funding will come from grants to avoid an unfunded mandate.

There have been other bills both this and last session working to expand access to menstrual products to both incarcerated individuals and students. I am seeking to build on the esteemed work of my colleagues and I ask for a favorable report on HB 588.

Additional article: <https://www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/maryland-bill-would-distribute-free-menstrualhygiene-products-to-low-income-households/2588683/>