



**Montgomery County Community Action Board Testimony in Support of HB588
Local Health Departments and Community Action Agencies - Feminine Hygiene Products
Wednesday, February 23, 2022**

TO: The Honorable Shane E. Pendergrass, Chair; The Honorable Josephine A. Pena-Melnyk, Vice Chair; and Members of the House Health and Government Operations 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 to women eligible for Medical Assistance 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.

This bill directly impacts an issue that is unique to women, who are more likely to be poor and more likely to be living below the Self-Sufficiency Standard. About 8.5% of women in Montgomery County 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 the basic necessities (housing, food, transportation, etc.) without government assistance.

Community Action Agencies (CAAs), which are named as one of the feminine hygiene product distributors in the bill, address many of the needs facing lower-income households. CAAs conduct data-driven community needs assessments to inform planning. 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. CAAs are therefore well-positioned to help coordinate this distribution program.

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>

With regard to funding, HB588 requires funding for the program in the Governor's budget, but we also ask that the indirect costs of administering this program be considered to ensure that CAAs and local health departments can adequately address this community need.

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.