

Testimony in Support of HB0490 Income Tax - Subtraction Modification for Donations to Diaper Banks and Other Charitable Entities - Sunset Repeal

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Dear House Ways and Means Committee Members,

I'm writing as a resident of district 43B, represented by Delegate Cathi Forbes and as the volunteer Period Project Coordinator for the Student Support Network.ⁱ Our organization's mission is to provide food, basic necessities, and advocacy to support the well-being of Baltimore County Public School students in need. We strongly support HB0490, the **Income Tax - Subtraction Modification for Donations to Diaper Banks and Other Charitable Entities - Sunset Repeal**.

Our organization recognizes the impact of period poverty or the lack of access to menstrual products has on our student's ability to attend school. Student Support Network is a member of the Alliance for Period Supplies, a national organization working to ensure that individuals in need have access to essential period products required to participate fully in daily life. APS is affiliated with the National Diaper Bank Network, which estimates that 1 in 3 families in the US experience diaper need. According to the Alliance for Period Supplies nationally about 1 in 4 teens have missed class and 2 in 5 women have struggled to purchase period products due to lack of income.ⁱⁱ

The Student Support Network has seen both an increase in the need for our services as well as an expansion in the number of schools we serve. Pre-pandemic we ran rooms of support in 12 Baltimore County Public Schools (BCPS), where students can come to receive food and essential hygiene items that they can take home that enable them to attend school by meeting their nutritional and hygienic needs beyond what schools provide. Today we serve students at 21 Baltimore County Public Schools. In Maryland 46% of female students in public school grades 7 to 12 attend Title 1 eligible schools and 66% of BCPS students (over 77,000) qualify for free or reduced-price meals up from 43% (or 50,000) in 2018. Public benefits programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) benefits do not cover the cost of purchasing diapers or period supplies.

Before the pandemic we struggled to keep menstrual products in stock to serve our students. Between March 2020 and June 2021 Student Support Network ran weekly community based food and essential items distributions, where we distributed close to half a million individual period products, in the form of pads, tampons and liners packaged into period cycle packs for families in need.

Our efforts to combat period poverty in Baltimore County during the pandemic have been youth initiated, starting with my daughter Abby's Girl Scout Gold Award project and continued by

other high school girls after she left the area for college. We have built a network of middle and high school student and adult volunteers who assemble packs of period products that have been donated by community members or purchased with funds donated to our organization. The student and adult volunteers learn about the impact of period poverty and understand what a lack of access to period supplies has on students' ability to attend class. Our students know what it is like to go to the bathroom, discover that their period has started and realize they don't have access to period supplies where they need it. They have wadded up toilet paper as a temporary measure, only to worry that they will leak blood on their cloths. They have put their health a risk by keeping a tampon in longer than recommended. They have had to ask peers and teachers for a pad or tampon when they didn't have one. Students miss school and are denied an education because of lack of access to menstrual products.

Once schools reopened in 2021, we went back to distributing essential items through our school based rooms of support. We currently distribute around 300 period supply packs per month and thanks to an increase in the awareness of period poverty and donations to support this program, we no longer struggle to keep menstrual products in stock. Students at our network schools can reliably come to our rooms of support to bring home a monthly supply of menstrual products. From July 2021 to December 2023 when the Income Tax - Subtraction Modification for Donations to Diaper Banks and Other Charitable Entities has been in effect, we received donations of \$5812 designated for our period supply program. In that same time period, we received donations of menstrual products valued at over \$40,000. In the 2021 to 2023 school years, our period supply program has distributed over 6000 monthly cycle kits each containing 25 items including pads, tampons and liners. All of our period supplies come from donations, whether through monetary donation designated for our period supply program or in kind donations of menstrual products. While some of these donations may have qualified for the Income tax subtraction, not all of the tax filers who donate to our program will end up claiming the donation. Many of our donations of products come from anonymous donors who give as part of large donation drives. The Income tax subtraction program for donations to Diaper and period supply banks facilitates additional donations beyond what MD taxpayers claim.

In the past, qualified charities like ours often struggled to receive adequate donations of diaper and period supplies which are among items most requested by women. This bill will continue to provide for our students experiencing homelessness or income insecurity by incentivizing the donation of period supplies and the funds to purchase them to organizations like ours who meet families' basic needs. It has helped us bring dignity to our families by providing them the hygienic supplies they need to go to school and work without shame or embarrassment and remedy an impediment to equal access to education and the workplace.

Thank you,

Phoebe Evans Letocha

ⁱ <https://studentsupportnetwork.org/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.allianceforperiodsupplies.org/index> For Maryland State factsheet see <https://allianceforperiodsupplies.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Maryland.pdf>