

March 2, 2026

Chair Wells, Vice Chair Kerr, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Paula Seabright and I am the co-chair of the Women's Giving Circle of Howard County's Grants Committee. I am also the chair of the Young Women's Giving Circle intern program. Our 10 high school interns learn about philanthropy, collective giving, leadership and advocacy through supporting our organization's efforts to impact period poverty.

I am taking the opportunity to submit testimony in support of legislation to require the provision of free menstrual hygiene products in public buildings. Ensuring access to these basic necessities is a practical, cost-effective step that advances public health, educational access, workplace participation, and human dignity.

Period poverty is widespread in the United States. Nearly one in four students reports difficulty affording menstrual products, and an estimated 16.9 million menstruating people nationwide live in poverty. Two in five people who menstruate report having struggled at some point to purchase the products they need. These figures demonstrate that lack of access is not a marginal issue. It affects millions of Americans across communities.

Lack of access has real consequences for participation and health. One in five students has missed school due to lack of menstrual products, and 39 percent of teens say it affects their ability to focus on schoolwork. Many report wearing products longer than recommended or using unsafe substitutes when supplies are unavailable, increasing risks of infection and other health complications. In public buildings such as libraries, transit facilities, and government offices, the absence of products can force individuals to leave early, miss appointments, or experience preventable embarrassment and stress.

Availability gaps remain significant. Majorities of teens report that free menstrual products are rarely or never available in school or public restrooms. While many states have taken steps to expand access in schools, policies covering broader public facilities remain inconsistent, and funding gaps often limit implementation. This legislation would establish a clear, uniform standard that treats menstrual products as the basic hygiene necessities they are and no different from toilet paper or soap.

The issue is one of equity and dignity. Research shows that students experiencing period poverty report higher levels of stress and stigma. Affordability challenges disproportionately affect low-income individuals and communities of color. **Providing products in public buildings helps ensure that participation in civic life, and public services does not depend on someone's ability to afford essential hygiene supplies on a given day.**

Public support is strong. Surveys consistently show that large majorities of Americans—including more than three-quarters of adults—support providing free menstrual

products in public settings. This is widely viewed as a commonsense, nonpartisan public health measure.

Importantly, the cost of providing menstrual products is modest relative to the benefits. Jurisdictions that have implemented similar policies report manageable supply costs and straightforward maintenance when products are stocked alongside other restroom essentials.

For these reasons, requiring menstrual products in public buildings is a practical, humane, and evidence-based policy. It promotes attendance, protects health, advances equity, and affirms the basic dignity of residents and visitors.

I respectfully urge a favorable report on this legislation.

Sincerely,

Paula Seabright

Columbia, MD