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HB 208
Public Schools – Provision of Menstrual Hygiene Products
Hearing of the House Ways & Means Committee
January 30, 2020

Position: SUPPORT

The Public Justice Center (PJC) is a not-for-profit civil rights and anti-poverty legal services organization which seeks to advance social justice, economic and racial equity, and fundamental human rights in Maryland. Our Health Rights Project supports policies and practices that promote the overall health of Marylanders struggling to make ends meet, with the explicit goal of promoting strategies that work to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities in health outcomes. PJC strongly supports HB 208, which would require each county board of education to ensure that public schools provide menstrual hygiene products to students, free of charge.

Much like food and shelter, menstrual hygiene products are a basic necessity for many women in Maryland. However, the state is far from achieving equity in access to menstrual hygiene products. Cost is a significant barrier for low-income women and students of color from low-income families in accessing these necessities. According to a 2019 survey, approximately two-thirds of low-income women in the United States were unable to afford menstrual hygiene products in 2018, and approximately one-fifth of these women encountered this barrier monthly.¹ Without adequate access to menstrual hygiene products, low-income students may be forced to stay home from school, which impairs their right to education. In fact, a separate survey found that nearly 8 out of 10 students reported missing class or skipping school due to not being able to access menstrual hygiene products.² A student's ability to receive an education should not be impaired as a result of period poverty.

If passed, HB 208 would require public schools to install low cost vending machines to provide tampons and maxi pads at no cost to students. This bill would address income, race and gender inequities in access to menstrual hygiene products by reducing the financial barriers that low-income students and students of color from low-income family's experience in affording these necessities.

For the foregoing reasons, the PJC **SUPPORTS HB 208** and urges a **FAVORABLE** report. Should you have any questions, please contact Ashley Black at (410) 625-9409, ext. 224 or blacka@publicjustice.org.

¹ Ann Sebert Kuhlmann et. al., Unmet Menstrual Hygiene Needs Among Low-Income Women, 133 Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology 2 (2019), https://journals.lww.com/greenjournal/Fulltext/2019/02000/Unmet_Menstrual_Hygiene_Needs_Among_Low_Income.2.aspx.

² U.S.: State of the Period, The Hidden Effects of Period Poverty in the US, Thinx & PERIOD (2019), https://cdn.shopify.com/s/files/1/0795/1599/files/State-of-the-Period-white-paper_Thinx_PERIOD.pdf?455788.

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