

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 427
Public Schools—Provision of Menstrual Hygiene Products—Requirement

House Ways and Means Committee

March 24, 2021

1:30 pm

Tina N. Dove, M.Ed.
Government Relations

The Maryland State Education Association supports Senate Bill 427, requiring county boards of education to ensure that each public middle and high school provide menstrual hygiene products—at no charge to students—via dispensers installed in restrooms. It also requires the state to reimburse local school systems for some costs associated with installing the dispensers needed to distribute the products and requires the Governor to include in their budget to reimburse local school systems for these costs.

MSEA represents 75,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland’s public schools, teaching and preparing our 896,837 students for careers and jobs of the future. MSEA also represents 39 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3 million-member National Education Association (NEA).

According to a 2016 Reuters Health News article, 86 percent of U.S. women aged 18 to 54 have experienced the unexpected onset of their menstrual cycle in public at a time when they did not have the supplies they needed.¹ According to the Always Confidence & Puberty Survey, “[N]early one in five American girls...have either left school early or missed school entirely because they did not have access to period products.”² The average woman spends \$70 per year on menstrual hygiene products³. For some, this may not appear to be a consequential amount. But for young people who are from low-income, under-resourced families or for those who are experiencing homelessness, this is a significant financial burden. Sadly, in far too many cases, young people are forced to skip school multiple days a

¹ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-menstruation-idUSKCN0WA1RG> (Accessed on January 24, 2021)

² <https://always.com/en-us/about-us/end-period-poverty> (Accessed on January 24, 2021)

³ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-menstruation-idUSKCN0WA1RG> (Accessed on January 24, 2021)



month and, consequently, several weeks out of the school year as a result of the challenges associated with their menstrual cycle. For others, extreme measures—including using unsuitable alternatives (such as newspaper, socks, rags or toilet paper), reusing spent hygiene products, or attempting to prolong the use of menstrual hygiene product past the recommended period of time—could lead to serious infections and/or long-term gynecological complications. This struggle is what is known as Period Poverty and it has significant adverse impacts on a large percentage of our young people. Not to mention, it serves as a critical public health issue for a significant percentage of both the U.S. and Maryland populations.

This legislation would have a tremendous positive impact on the lives of young Marylanders experiencing Period Poverty. It will also serve as welcomed relief for those who have experienced the shame and stigma associated with being caught “unprepared” when their menstrual cycle unexpectedly arrives while they are at school.

Our young people have more than enough to contend with during their adolescence. Far too often, our schools are unable to minimize or prevent the myriad hardships our students face. In this case, however, our schools have the means to provide the resources young people need to manage their menstrual cycles. MSEA supports menstrual equity because it is a social and gender justice issue and because it is the right thing to do. **We urge the committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 427.**