

Alina Glass Testimony Menstrual Equality Bill

Teens across America are struggling to pay for menstruation products. According to a national study, one in five teenagers say they have struggled to pay for them or haven't been able to afford them at all.¹ They are forced to turn to the nurse's office, a trusted teacher, or friend to compensate. Students might even choose to stay home rather than deal with the awkwardness of not knowing where their products will come from. It certainly doesn't help that periods are a taboo, embarrassing subject, especially for younger teens who are experiencing it for the first time. The fix is simple: schools must provide free menstruation products in restrooms.

With 20.2% of Baltimore City Public Schools students living below the poverty line² and constant budget cuts,³ it is these schools that need free menstruation products the most. Baltimore City Public Schools have been underfunded for as long as they have existed.⁴ To provide these products for public school students would be winning a small battle in the overarching fight for funding. Even this seemingly small victory, however, would positively affect the lives of thousands.

The stress that comes with dealing with a period in school isn't often touched upon. From obsessively changing my tampon to whispering a quick "Can you check me?" to my friends, it's always on my mind when I'm in school. This inevitable stress would only be amplified tenfold if I didn't have the proper products to handle my period. It isn't hard to see why 25% of teens have missed class due to a lack of access to menstruation products.⁵ Not only is dealing with a period at school stressful, but there's also a level of shame that comes with it – 64% of teens say that society teaches them to be ashamed of their periods.⁶ Because of societal stigmatization of menstruation, it can be difficult to talk to even your parents about your period, let alone ask a teacher for a pad or tampon. By providing free products in restrooms, students could completely avoid this uncomfortable situation and be on their periods in school stress-free.

Over a dozen states, including California, Illinois, New Hampshire, and New York⁷ have already passed similar bills, and it is time we follow suit. "While it may seem like a small thing, I think it has larger ramifications in making [those with periods] feel comfortable," says Washington Senator Manka Dhingra.⁸ Providing free menstrual products is a critical step

¹ <https://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/growing-awareness-period-poverty-schools>

² <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/97000US2400090-baltimore-city-public-schools-md/>

³ <https://www.baltimoresun.com/education/bs-md-city-schools-20200922-tglw3a7nvvdxfaec6zqsdoqoz4-story.html>

⁴ <https://www.baltimoreteachers.org/kirwan-a-once-in-a-generation-opportunity-for-our-public-schools/>

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[https://www.parents.com/news/survey-menstrual-hygiene-products-period-poverty/#:~:text=25%25%20of%20student s%20\(1%20in,depth%20education%20around%20menstrual%20health.](https://www.parents.com/news/survey-menstrual-hygiene-products-period-poverty/#:~:text=25%25%20of%20student s%20(1%20in,depth%20education%20around%20menstrual%20health.)

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<https://www.wsj.com/articles/more-states-consider-free-tampons-in-school-bathrooms-11582626601#:~:text=More%20than%20a%20dozen%20state,school%20boards%20and%20universities%20have>

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towards ending period poverty in our public schools and destigmatizing periods for teens at such a vulnerable time in their lives.