



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in Support of HB87

Testimony by Delegate Vaughn Stewart
January 24th, 2023 • Appropriations Committee

What the Bill Does:

HB87 is a step towards allowing recipients of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) to use their benefits to purchase diapers and menstrual products. SNAP gives families a monthly dollar amount on a preloaded Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card to purchase food. WIC does not provide a dollar amount for food items, but rather offers nutrition education, breastfeeding support, and nutritious food based on a recipient's situation. Both SNAP and WIC are administered at the federal level by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

HB87 instructs the state agencies with oversight of SNAP and WIC (the Maryland Department of Human Services and the Maryland Department of Health, respectively) to apply for any waiver that would allow for these benefits to be used for the purchasing of diapers and menstrual products. At the moment, no such waiver exists. Once USDA makes one available, these departments must apply for the waiver. Once granted, the state agencies would be required to implement the changes.

Why the Bill is Important:

Every month, 1.8 billion people across the world menstruate. However, one in four women in the U.S. struggled to purchase period products in 2018.¹ In 2021, Black and Hispanic people who

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https://www.plannedparenthoodaction.org/uploads/filer_public/d3/d3/d3d3914a-d23c-4819-a69a-bc437aca922a/2020_period_poverty_fact_sheet.pdf

menstruate were more likely to agree they struggled to afford period products (35% and 36%, respectively vs. 23% of White respondents).² People who struggle to afford the menstrual products they need may resort to dangerous and unsanitary options, like wearing a pad or tampon for more than four hours, which puts them at greater risk of infections like toxic shock syndrome. People might also resort to substitute products, like toilet paper or socks, if they are not able to afford the safer products.

Low-income parents often struggle to afford diapers for their children; nearly three in ten low-income parents reported that they could not afford diapers.³ With diapers costing nearly \$100 per month per child, this can be a serious burden for low-income parents or parents who are unable to work. A study by Yale University concluded that families with an adequate supply of diapers experience less parenting stress than families without an adequate supply.

Expanding what can be purchased using SNAP and WIC benefits would alleviate some of the financial burden associated with buying these products. The only current SNAP or WIC benefit packages that exist for personal care items are reserved for pregnant and breastfeeding women, which only cover infant formula and related food items. Access to diapers and menstrual hygiene products will help low-income Marylanders and their children stay clean, healthy, and comfortable. In addition, fewer individuals will have to miss work or school because they don't have access to the products they need. This bill will give individuals more financial freedom to purchase the goods they need without having to worry how it will affect their income. **These hygiene products are not optional. They are necessary for personal care and quality of life.**

Why the Committee Should Vote Favorably:

SNAP and WIC recipients are some of the most vulnerable Marylanders, and those with periods or children bear an added financial burden. Illinois passed identical legislation in 2021, which went into effect in 2022. To date, they have not been granted a USDA waiver, but we're hopeful that as more states pass similar legislation, the federal government will feel more compelled to oblige.

²

https://cdn.b12.io/client_media/HJ1wIVtI/1d8564dc-bf10-11eb-9c7a-0242ac110002-U_by_Kotex_Period_Poverty_-_PPAW_Data_Se_t.pdf

³

<https://www.cbpp.org/research/family-income-support/end-diaper-need-and-period-poverty-families-need-cash-assistance-to#:~:text=A%20study%20conducted%20by%20Yale.with%20low%20incomes%20in%20St.>

Marylanders who rely on SNAP and WIC should be able to use their benefits to purchase diapers and menstrual hygiene products. I urge a favorable report.