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BILL NO: Senate Bill 52  
TITLE: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programs – Waiver – Diapers and Menstrual Hygiene Products  
COMMITTEE: Finance  
HEARING DATE: February 2, 2023  
POSITION: **SUPPORT**

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Assuming the U.S. Department of Agriculture makes a waiver available, Senate Bill 52 would require the Department of Human Services to apply for a waiver to allow benefits under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), or the Special Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for Women Infants, and Children (WIC) to be used to purchase diapers or menstrual products. The purpose of the SNAP and WIC programs are to increase health outcomes for low-income women and families in Maryland. While diapers and menstrual products are not explicitly related to nutrition, they are both necessities and lack of access to such products is linked to negative health consequences. The Women's Law Center supports Senate Bill 52 because it would assist women who are already often the primary care takers and increasingly the sole or primary income-earner for families secure the products they need to ensure their health and the health of their families.

Decreasing barriers to access for diapers is based in sound economic and gender fairness policy. Without diapers, infants cannot participate in childcare and early childhood development programs. When children cannot participate in those programs, oftentimes caregivers cannot work but rather must stay home with their children, continuing the cycle of poverty and underemployment. As many as 1 in 3 mothers report difficulties in affording basic necessities for their infants, including diapers. By supporting access to diapers, we support working women and their ability to support their families.

Similarly, providing women with feminine hygiene products is a matter of simple human dignity. They are not a luxury, nor should they be treated as such. Recent studies show that when left without access to period products, homeless women and girls often have to improvise, steal tampons, ask strangers for help, substitute paper towels for pads, and even use T-shirts as makeshift rags. These coping practices lead to poor menstrual hygiene. Poor menstrual health and practices, research shows, can lead to serious infections like bacterial growth in the vagina or toxic shock syndrome. Lack of access to menstrual products can also lead to people missing school or work. A 2019 report in the Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology found that two-thirds of women living in poverty could not afford such products the previous year and one-fifth could not afford them on a monthly basis. According to a 2019 national survey, two-thirds of teens feel stressed about inadequate access to menstrual hygiene products, 1 in 5 teens have struggled to afford products, and 84% of students have missed class or skipped school due to lack of access to these products.

For all the foregoing reasons, the Women's Law Center of Maryland, Inc. urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 52.

**The Women's Law Center of Maryland is a non-profit legal services organization whose mission is to ensure the physical safety, economic security, and bodily autonomy of women in Maryland. Our mission is advanced through direct legal services, information and referral hotlines, and statewide advocacy.**