

Members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Paula Seabright and I am the co-chair of the Women's Giving Circle of Howard County's Grants Committee. I am also the chair of the Young Women's Giving Circle intern program. Our 10 high school interns learn about philanthropy, collective giving, leadership and advocacy through supporting our organization's efforts to impact period poverty.

In 2021, the MDGA passed legislation requiring public school systems to install period product dispensers in restrooms in their schools, starting the state on a path to making sure menstruating students have all the tools they need to succeed. We aren't there yet, but we are getting closer.

One of the steps in closing the gap for menstruating students to make the most of their educational opportunities comes in HB457. This bill requires publicly funded institutions of higher learning to make period products available to students in restrooms in school buildings.

A pilot study by the NIH published in 2024 stated that:

17.1% of students have faced period poverty, 55.8% experienced period-related class disruption, and 47.5% avoided changing their menstrual products on campus. The relationships between the three menstrual experiences were statistically significant. In the open responses, students reported that their personal experiences with menstruation were largely painful and disruptive. We identified the following themes: (1) inadequate water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities; (2) understocked, empty, or non-existent menstrual product dispensers; (3) a desire for additional resources for menstruation; and (4) the unpredictability of menstruation. ¹

Among the recommendations for improving the educational experience for menstruating students, the study authors stated schools should provide free menstrual products.

The Women's Giving Circle has been doing our part to fight period poverty. We have collection boxes in all Howard county public libraries where patrons can drop off donations that other patrons can take as needed. Since December of 2024, we have held three community product drives collecting over 300 lbs of products for students in the Howard county public school system and at Howard Community College. And we've raised thousands of dollars to purchase products for clients of our many nonprofit partners. We believe in the work we are doing. We also believe that one of the most important parts of philanthropic work is our ability to raise awareness about issues to people in positions to facilitate change. Del Feldmark has been a staunch supporter of our work. She's listened to our concerns for our community and has filed this bill to help our voices have an even greater impact. Maryland has a chance to join five states and the District of Columbia in making period products free for menstruating students in higher education. I hope you will vote favorable for this legislation.

Thank you,
Paula Seabright
Columbia, MD

¹ NIH Source: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11143816/>

