



TESTIMONY TO THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

HB0457: Institutions of Higher Education- Provision of Menstrual Hygiene Products- Requirement

POSITION: Support

BY: Linda Kohn, President

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The League of Women Voters of Maryland supports House Bill 457, which would require institutions of higher education to provide menstrual hygiene products free of charge in all restrooms. The League supports a health care system that ensures equitable access to affordable, quality health care- including reproductive health care- for all residents. The League's "Meeting Basic Human Needs" position also stresses that persons whose earnings are inadequate have the right to services and materials sufficient to meet their needs for food, shelter, and access to health care.

Menstrual hygiene is a basic human need. "Period poverty," or the inability to afford sanitary products to manage menstrual bleeding, affects women all over the world, including in Maryland.¹ Women need to manage their periods with dignity and comfort. The lack of adequate access to period products has a strong negative impact on women's mental health and well-being, as well as on their ability to participate in normal activities such as work and school. Without access to these essential items, women can be forced to choose between buying tampons and pads or buying food, as state and federal public health and nutritional assistance programs such as WIC or SNAP do not cover the costs of menstrual products.

Feminine hygiene products are medical necessities, and period poverty is a public health issue. Lack of adequate access to menstrual hygiene products can increase the risk of serious infections such as toxic shock, as women can extend the use of pads or tampons past the recommended time period, or be forced to use unsanitary materials such as rags, socks, paper towels, toilet paper or newspaper to manage menstrual bleeding.

Access to menstrual hygiene products is an equity and human rights issue. Period poverty disproportionately affects poor women and women of color. All Marylanders, including college students, should be able to manage their periods with dignity, knowing they have adequate access to safe menstrual hygiene products.

House Bill 457 would make feminine hygiene products available free of charge in institutions of higher education. **The League and its 2,000 members urge a favorable report on House Bill 457.**

¹ https://cdn.b12.io/client_media/HJ1wIVtI/e5c8dfb4-95f9-11ea-a54f-0242ac110003-Maryland_APS_Period_Poverty_Fact_Sheet_052020.pdf