

BILL NUMBER: HB 457

TITLE: Institutions of Higher Education – Free Menstrual Hygiene Products – Requirement

COMMITTEE: Appropriations Health

HEARING DATE: 2/24

POSITION: Favorable

Reproductive Justice Maryland Action supports House Bill 457 in keeping with our mission to champion reproductive justice as a fundamental human right for all Marylanders. We believe that everyone deserves the ability to manage their reproductive health with dignity, safety, and autonomy, free from stigma and unnecessary barriers. This includes ensuring that students who menstruate have reliable access to menstrual hygiene products in all restrooms at institutions of higher education.

Period product insecurity is well-documented among young adults. Research shows that many college students experience financial hardship, food insecurity, and housing instability, conditions that increase the likelihood of being unable to afford basic hygiene products.^{1, 2, 3} Studies conducted among U.S. women and college-aged populations have found significant associations between menstrual product insecurity and increased stress, shame, and depressive symptoms.¹ When students are forced to leave class, miss work, or navigate campus without access to necessary products, their academic engagement and well-being suffer.

Maryland has made progress in advancing menstrual equity in K–12 schools. House Bill 457 builds upon that foundation by extending protections to students in higher education settings. College campuses serve diverse populations, including low-income students, first-generation students, parenting students, transgender and nonbinary students, and students experiencing housing instability. For many, campus facilities are where they spend the majority of their day. Ensuring that menstrual hygiene products are available in

¹ Cardoso, L.F., Scolese, A.M., Hamidaddin, A. *et al.* Period poverty and mental health implications among college-aged women in the United States. *BMC Women's Health* 21, 14 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12905-020-01149-5>

² Seed, L., Biju, A., & Johnson, E. (2022). Period product insecurity in higher education: A call for change. *BMJ Sexual & Reproductive Health*, 48(4), 313–314. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.srh-2022-201489>

³ *Period Poverty Among College Students: Access, Equity, and Strategies to Address the Issue*. National Center for Safe Supportive Learning Environments. (n.d.). <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED653006.pdf?utm>

all restrooms, regardless of gender designation, promotes dignity, inclusion, and educational equity.

The requirement that products be provided free of charge is critical. Even small out-of-pocket costs can create barriers for students already balancing tuition, housing, transportation, and food expenses. Additionally, providing products in restrooms normalizes menstruation as a routine biological function and reduces stigma, aligning campus policies with broader public health principles.

Importantly, this legislation is not only a gender equity measure, but also a public health and economic investment. Educational attainment is strongly associated with long-term earnings, workforce participation, and economic mobility.⁴ Supporting students' ability to remain in class, focused, and engaged without interruption due to a basic health need is a modest but meaningful step toward strengthening Maryland's future workforce.

House Bill 457 represents a practical, evidence-informed policy solution that advances dignity, equity, and student success across Maryland's higher education institutions. For these reasons, Reproductive Justice Maryland Action respectfully urges a favorable report on House Bill 457.

⁴ *Social Security Administration*. The United States Social Security Administration. (n.d.). https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/research-summaries/education-earnings.html?utm_