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WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 457
Institutions of Higher Education – Provision of Menstrual Hygiene Products – Requirement
Committee: Appropriations
By: Maryland Public Health Association (MdpHA)
Hearing Date: February 24, 2026

Dear Chair Ben Barnes, Vice-Chair Anne Kaiser, and Members of the House Appropriations Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify in favor of House Bill 457, requiring each institution of higher education to provide, free of charge, menstrual hygiene products in all restrooms at the institution on or before August 1, 2028.

This legislation is important because it promotes health equity, student retention, and economic fairness across Maryland’s higher education system.

Vulnerable populations, such as college students and individuals with low-income struggle to obtain and pay for essential everyday needs, including menstrual hygiene products.^{1,2,3} Period poverty remains a significant problem on university campuses, disproportionately impacting the most vulnerable students. Limited or unequal access to menstrual products can result in various adverse effects, including physical discomfort, emotional distress, and challenges that interfere with academic performance. These factors adversely affect their education through absenteeism, reduced engagement, and poor academic performance.⁴ Also, for students already facing tuition costs, housing expenses, and food insecurity, the inability to access basic hygiene supplies can create additional stress and disrupt academic participation.

Period poverty intensifies the difficulties associated with menstruation. Studies indicate that when limited access to menstrual products is combined with menstrual pain and stress among college students, it

¹ National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments. (n.d.). Period Poverty Among College Students: Access, Equity, and Strategies to Address the Issue. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED653006.pdf>

² Cardoso, L. F., Scolese, A. M., Hamidaddin, A., & Gupta, J. (2021). Period poverty and mental health implications among college-aged women in the United States. *BMC Women’s Health*, 21, Article 14. <https://bmcwomenshealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12905-020-01149-5>

³ Kuhlmann, A. S., Bergquist, E. P., Danjoint, D., & Wall, L. L. (2019). Unmet menstrual hygiene needs among low-income women. *Obstetrics & Gynecology*, 133(2), 238–244. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30633137/>

⁴ Munro, A. K., Keep, M., Hunter, E. C., & Hossain, S. Z. (2022). Confidence to manage menstruation among university students in Australia: Evidence from a cross-sectional survey. *Women’s Health*, 18. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/17455065211070666>

negatively affects their physical health, emotional well-being, and academic experiences, and is also linked to higher rates of depression.^{5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10}

Some states have started acknowledging the need to address period poverty by supplying or preparing to supply free menstrual products at institutions of higher education.¹¹ In 2021, California enacted the first law in the United States mandating that public colleges provide students with free menstrual products, with campuses required to comply by the beginning of the 2023 academic year.

Providing menstrual hygiene products aligns with public health principles of prevention and equity. Just as campuses provide toilet paper and soap without charge, menstrual products should be recognized as essential items that support health and participation. Ensuring access helps remove barriers to academic success, particularly for first-generation students and those from low-income backgrounds.² The fiscal impact of providing these products is modest relative to the state's broader investment in higher education and workforce development.¹²

By reducing preventable absenteeism and supporting student dignity, HB0457 strengthens Maryland's commitment to student success and equitable access. We respectfully urge a favorable report.

Thank you.

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⁵ Hennegan, J., Shannon, A. K., Rubli, J., Schwab, K. J., & Melendez-Torres, G. J. (2019). Women's and girls' experiences of menstruation in low- and middle-income countries: A systematic review and qualitative metasynthesis. *PLOS Medicine*, 16, Article e1002803.

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31095568/>

⁶ Mason, L., Nyothach, E., Alexander, K., Odhiambo, F. O., Eleveld, A., Vulule, J., Rheingans, R., Laserson, K. F., Mohammed, A., & Phillips-Howard, P. A. (2013). "We keep it secret so no one should know"—A qualitative study to explore young schoolgirls attitudes and experiences with menstruation in rural western Kenya. *PLOS ONE*, 8(11), Article e79132.

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24244435/>

⁷ Phillips-Howard, P. A., Caruso, B., Torondel, B., Zulaika, G., Sahin, M., & Sommer, M. (2016). Menstrual hygiene management among adolescent schoolgirls in low and middle-income countries: Research priorities. *Global Health Action*, 9, Article 33032. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5148805/>

⁸ Sivakami, M., van Eijk, A. M., Thakur, H., Kakade, N., Patil, C., Shinde, S., Surani, N., Bauman, A., Zulaika, G., Kabir, Y., Dobhal, A., Singh, P., Tahiliani, B., Mason, L., Alexander, K. T., Thakkar, M. B., Laserson, K. F., & PhillipsHoward, P. A. (2019). Effect of menstruation on girls and their schooling, and facilitators of menstrual hygiene management in schools: Surveys in government schools in three states in India, 2015. *Journal of Global Health*, 9(1), Article 010408.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6286883/>

⁹ Sumpter, C., & Torondel, B. (2013). A systematic review of the health and social effects of menstrual hygiene management. *PLOS ONE*, 8, Article e62004. <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0062004>

¹⁰ van Eijk, A. M., Sivakami, M., Thakkar, M. B., Bauman, A., Laserson, K. F., Coates, S., & Phillips-Howard, P. A. (2016). Menstrual hygiene management among adolescent girls in India: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *BMJ Open*, 6(3), Article e010290. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26936906/>

¹¹ Gruer, C., Goss, T., Schmitt, M. L., & Sommer, M. (2021). Menstrual equity initiatives at USA universities: A multiple case study of common obstacles and enabling factors. *Frontiers in Reproductive Health*, 3, Article 787277.

<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/frph.2021.787277/full>

¹² U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2022). *K-12 education: School districts report challenges to meeting students' basic needs*. GAO-22-105815. <https://www.gao.gov>