

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 0941

Subject: FAVORABLE – HB 0941 – Menstrual Products in Public Buildings

Good evening, esteemed Representatives.

My name is Carla Gates. I live in Columbia, Maryland, and I am testifying in strong support of House Bill 0941. I have been a Registered Nurse for more than 30 years, and I specialize in health equity and advocacy. My work focuses on how structural conditions—policy, access, and environment—shape health outcomes long before a patient enters a clinical setting.

I urge the Committee's support for **HB 0941** for the following data-driven reasons:

1. The Reality of Period Poverty in Maryland

While Maryland has eliminated the "tampon tax," price is only one barrier. According to the Alliance for Period Supplies, **1 in 9 women and girls in Maryland live below the federal poverty line**. Data from the *Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology* indicates that nearly **two-thirds of low-income women** cannot afford menstrual products at least once a year, with many forced to choose between hygiene and food. In public spaces, this is not just an affordability issue; it is a **geographic access gap** for those relying on public transit or experiencing housing instability.

2. Clinical Risk and Public Health Burdens

As a healthcare professional, I see the downstream effects of "product stretching." When access is restricted, individuals may:

- Use unsafe substitutes (rags, paper towels, or toilet paper).
- Use products longer than the recommended 4–8 hour window.

These practices significantly increase the risk of **Bacterial Vaginosis (BV), Yeast Infections, and Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS)**. By providing products in public buildings, we move the needle from *reactive* medical treatment for infections to *proactive* public health prevention, ultimately reducing avoidable visits to Maryland's over-burdened emergency departments.

3. Economic and Educational Participation

Health equity is an economic driver. A 2021 study found that **1 in 4 students** struggled to afford period products, leading to missed school days. This logic extends to the workforce: adults who lack access while using public facilities (like transit hubs or libraries) face barriers to staying at work or attending appointments.

HB 0941 ensures that Marylanders can participate in public life without the threat of a "biological penalty" that interrupts their productivity and education.

4. Parity with Existing Public Health Standards

We do not ask visitors to public buildings to carry their own soap, toilet paper, or paper towels; these are universally recognized as essential for sanitation. Providing menstrual products is the logical completion of this hygiene standard. Maryland has already set a precedent by requiring these products in public schools—this bill simply closes the gap for the rest of our adult population.

Conclusion

HB 0941 is a practical, evidence-based policy. It affirms that participation in public life should not depend on income or biology. This is a low-cost intervention with a high-impact return on dignity, health, and equity. I urge a **FAVORABLE** report on HB 0941.

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Selected References & Data Sources

- **Kuhlmann, A. S., et al. (2019).** "Unmet Menstrual Hygiene Needs Among Low-Income Women." *Obstetrics & Gynecology*, 133(2), 238–244. [doi:10.1097/AOG.0000000000003060](https://doi.org/10.1097/AOG.0000000000003060).
 - *Key Finding:* 64% of low-income women were unable to afford needed supplies in the previous year; 21% experienced this monthly.
- **Cardoso, L. F., et al. (2021).** "Period poverty and mental health implications among college-aged women in the United States." *BMC Women's Health*, 21(14). [doi:10.1186/s12905-020-01149-5](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12905-020-01149-5).
 - *Key Finding:* 14.2% of college-aged women experienced period poverty in the past year, with significant correlations to depression and anxiety.
- **Alliance for Period Supplies (2025).** "State of Maryland Period Poverty Report." [Maryland.pdf](#)
 - *Key Finding:* 1 in 9 women and girls in Maryland live below the Federal Poverty Level.
- **Thinx & PERIOD (2021).** "State of the Period 2021: The impact of period poverty on U.S. students."
 - *Key Finding:* 23% of students have struggled to afford period products; 16% have worn a product longer than the recommended 4–8 hours due to lack of access.