

Chair Wilkins, Vice Chair Feldmark, and members of the 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.

The MDGA passed legislation in 2021 requiring public k-12 school systems to install period product dispensers in some restrooms in their schools. As our interns explored this requirement in Howard county, they found that while the dispensers were installed, they were empty most of the time. All of my interns had a horror story about a classmate who needed a product and couldn't find it quickly. I won't go into details. If you've had a period, or know someone who has, you've heard everything I have.

One in five menstruating students report missing school because they can't afford period products. This puts these students at risk of falling behind in their studies. Or if they choose to go to school while using something other than a product designed for menstrual flow, they risk illness.

Of course, there are many educators in our schools who keep a supply of products for their students; products they provide at their own expense. Students can go to the health room in their school as well, and maybe they won't have to ask for a product or get scolded for taking enough to get them through the day.

The simplest way to make life easy and school less horrifying for menstruating students is to require dispensers are stocked as HB541 lays out. A quick trip to the restroom and then back to class, instead of an epic journey through a building to search for a product like Indiana Jones pursuing the holy grail. Of course, Indy found the holy grail which makes him more successful than a kid trying to find a tampon at school. On behalf of the women's giving circle and in support of every menstruating student you know and love, I urge this committee to vote in favor of this legislation.