



Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Nicole Clegg and I serve as the interim CEO at Planned Parenthood of Northern New England, and I am pleased to submit testimony in support of LD 348.

Planned Parenthood of Northern New England provides comprehensive reproductive and sexual health care to more than 14,000 people in Maine at four health centers located in Biddeford, Portland, Sanford, and Topsham. People turn to us for affordable, high-quality care including wellness exams, birth control, disease testing and treatment, cancer screenings, abortion care as well as a variety of primary care services. We see everyone who comes to us regardless of ability to pay, and in a typical year, we provide more than \$4 million in free and discounted care to our communities in Maine.

As a mission driven health care provider, we fundamentally believe everyone should be able to get affordable, high quality sexual and reproductive health care in their communities, no matter where they live or how much money they make, and we advocate for policies that help make this vision a reality.

Lack of consistent, affordable access to menstrual products is a significant burden for many who are unable to reliably access or pay for them. People who menstruate spend over \$1000 in the course of their lifetime on menstrual products, a cost that is prohibitive for many. A lack of access to menstrual products has been associated with negative health outcomes, including higher rates of cervical cancer and increased rates of infection, school absenteeism, and feelings of shame, fear, anxiety, and distraction. Unfortunately, the consequences are often most heavily borne by vulnerable groups including school-aged young people:

- More than 4 in 5 students have either missed class time or know a classmate who missed class time because they did not have access to period products<sup>1</sup>.
- 51% of students have used a menstrual product for longer than medically recommended because they did not have adequate access to products putting their health at risk<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> "State of the Period: The widespread impact of period poverty on US students", *Survey Commissioned by THINX and PERIOD*, 2019,

<sup>2</sup> "State of the Period 2021: The widespread impact of period poverty on US students", *Survey Commissioned by THINX and PERIOD*, May 2021.

- 38% often or sometimes cannot do their best schoolwork due to lack of access to period products.<sup>3</sup>
- Nearly 1 in 4 students have struggled to afford period products<sup>4</sup>
- 16% of students reported choosing to buy period products over food or clothes during the COVID pandemic. Latinx, rural, low-income, and college students were most impacted<sup>5</sup>.

The lack of access coupled with the stigma surrounding menstruation can be particularly harmful for students. A recent survey found that the majority of teens reported feelings of shame, self-consciousness, and/or embarrassment about their periods, “reflect[ing] negative sentiments that follow [them] throughout their lives on what is typically a monthly basis, and a foundation for increased emotional anxiety with numerous potential effects.” In the same survey, 51% of students stated that they feel like their school does not care about them if they do not provide free period products in their bathrooms.<sup>6</sup>

School bathrooms stock products, such as toilet paper, soap, and paper towels, and we need to be approaching menstrual products with the same perspective, they are necessities. LD 348 is an important step in addressing menstrual equity, enabling people with periods the freedom to work, study, and participate with basic dignity. This legislation will benefit the young people of Maine, particularly low-income students, both directly by providing consistent access to menstrual products and indirectly by reducing stigma around menstruation via the visible provision of products alongside other necessities like soap and toilet paper. Periods should not hold anyone back, period.

For these reasons, I strongly urge you to vote to pass LD 348

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> “State of the Period: The widespread impact of period poverty on US students”, Survey Commissioned by THINX and PERIOD, 2019