



Maine Education Association

Grace Leavitt President | Jesse Hargrove Vice President | Beth French Treasurer
Rebecca Cole NEA Director | Rachelle Bristol Executive Director

Testimony

In Support of

LD 348 An Act to Make Menstrual Products Available in Certain Schools **Grace Leavitt, President, Maine Education Association** **Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs** **May 9, 2023**

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Grace Leavitt. My pronouns are she, her, hers. I am serving as President of the Maine Education Association while on leave from teaching Spanish in MSAD 51. I have over 43 years of classroom teaching experience with 20 years as a National Board Certified teacher. The MEA represents nearly 24,000 educators in our Maine system of public education in pre-K-12 schools as well as in our institutions of higher education, both the University of Maine System and the Maine Community College System, along with students in teacher prep programs as well as many retired educators.

I am here to testify on behalf of MEA in support of LD 348 An Act to Make Menstrual Products Available in Certain Schools.

In 2021, MEA testified in support of LD 452—this same bill. While it was passed on both votes in the House and on the first vote in the Senate, it was placed on special appropriations table, and then the legislature adjourned so it was not enacted. It had a much higher fiscal note at the time, which MEA questioned and felt certain was much too high a calculation. Nonetheless, here we are, two years later, hoping that this finally becomes reality. Since 2021, in the past two years, how many days of school have students who menstruate missed, due to a lack of access to menstrual products? While we do not have data on this for our state, we know from studies that in the United States between 20-25% of students who menstruate struggle to afford proper menstrual products¹, and that many of these students have missed school because of this². Obviously for our students who are experiencing unstable housing or who are lacking housing altogether the impact is even greater.

While schools already provide menstrual products in their nurses' offices, access is limited. And it means that a student must first ask to go to the nurse's office and often can be difficult for a young student to do, and then the student misses even more class time.

We would never consider handling the accessibility of toilet paper in the same way, would we? Why should menstrual products, which are as much a necessity, be handled any differently?

The lack of accessibility to menstrual products affects not only a student's attendance in class or even attendance for the full school day or for several days of school each month, this situation also impacts the student's overall health—physical as well as mental health.³ This all, of course, impacts learning for students who menstruate, and continues a longstanding inequity for half of the student population.

At least 18 other states provide menstrual products in schools. Let's make Maine the next state to do so and end this inequity.

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We urge your support of LD 348—period.

¹<https://www.usnews.com/education/k12/articles/how-schools-can-address-period-poverty>

²<https://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/growing-awareness-period-poverty-schools>

³<https://www.csg.org/2023/03/06/period-poverty-barriers-to-safe-and-equitable-menstrual-hygiene/#:~:text=Menstrual%20product%20shortages%20like%20the,ranging%20from%204%2D7%25>

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