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Testimony of Rep. Kristen Cloutier introducing
LD 348, An Act to Make Menstrual Products Available in Certain Schools
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Good afternoon, Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and esteemed colleagues of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Kristen Cloutier and I represent House District 94, which includes a portion of my hometown of Lewiston. I am here today to introduce **LD 348, An Act to Make Menstrual Products Available in Certain Schools**.

Let me be blunt: it is expensive to menstruate.

A box of 45 tampons or 48 maxi pads now costs \$10.47, a 10% increase from 2021 to 2022.¹

Lower-income and unhoused Mainers who menstruate often struggle with what is known as “period poverty,” or the inability to afford sufficient menstrual products. And unfortunately, “period poverty” is a very real and very common problem in our state.

It is not uncommon for menstrual products to be rationed in lower-income households, where only a limited number of pads or tampons may be available to a young teen. While my own teenage daughter is fortunate to live in a household that can provide for her needs, many of her peers in middle school are not.

In addition to many Mainers not having the financial resources to purchase the products they need, our society has created a stigma around menstruation by treating it as shameful and embarrassing. We refer to menstrual products as “sanitary” due to the misperception that menstruating is somehow “unsanitary.”

And while many Maine schools currently provide pads and tampons in a nurses office, which is incredibly helpful to students who menstruate, if a student is taken by surprise by their menstrual period (which anyone who menstruates knows is a common occurrence), or if they were to run

¹ As tampon shortage drags on, Maine nonprofits brace for challenges.

<https://www.bangordailynews.com/2022/06/23/news/midcoast/tampon-shortage-in-maine-brings-challenges-for-nonprofits-xoasq1i29i/>

out of products during the school day, they must request a visit to the nurses office. These requests often lead to further shame and embarrassment on the part of our students..

I ask that you consider the following scenario:

Imagine a student who has only just begun menstruating, whose family cannot afford enough of the products they need. They are rationed two pads or tampons to use for the entire day, which for them, is not enough. They can request a hall pass and risk the embarrassment of telling their teacher why they need to go to the nurses office, or they can risk bleeding through their clothing and suffer the social consequences from their peers. In the case of the tampons, they also risk contracting Toxic Shock Syndrome, a rare, life-threatening complication caused by using a tampon for longer than the recommended 4-8 hours.

Given these limited choices, some students choose not to attend school at all when they are menstruating. We have created a system where a lack of access to menstrual products presents a lack of access to educational opportunities. We can and must do better.

Just as we supply toilet paper to students to address other bodily functions, so should we supply menstrual products to address menstruation. Young people should not be ashamed of normal bodily functions that they have no control over. Nor should they be forced into life threatening situations because of that shame.

This legislation may sound familiar. It was proposed to this committee in the 130th Legislature. Since deciding to reintroduce the bill this session, I have worked with organizations like The Period Project and Aunt Flo, state advocates and educators, legislators from other states who have implemented similar programs and with the committee analyst to determine and generate a much more realistic fiscal note that is nearly half the cost. I hope this makes the legislation a bit more palatable for both members of this committee and those serving on the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee.

Thank you for your consideration of this crucial legislation and of furthering equity in our public schools.

I am happy to answer any questions.