



Testimony in support of LD 452

[An Act To Require Certain Schools To Provide Menstrual Products](#)

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 Senior Vice President of Public Affairs at Planned Parenthood of Northern New England and I am pleased to submit testimony in support of LD 452.

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 during 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 teens have either missed class time or know a classmate who missed class time because they did not have access to period products.
- More than 60% of teenagers have used a menstrual product for longer than medically-recommended because they did not have adequate access to products putting their health at risk.

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.

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 452 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 452.

Many people who menstruate spend a significant amount of money on products to manage their periods over the course of their lifetimes, and these costs can be especially difficult for those who are struggling financially. This is further exacerbated by the stigma attached to menstruation. Students skip school for fear of shame and ridicule. People miss work or improvise ways to manage a period that pose potential health risks. Even the purchase of these products can be a source of embarrassment. This makes no sense. As a state and country, we need to be taking steps to end the secrecy and stigma that surrounds menstruation. The simple fact is that half of the population has a period. It's a normal part of people's lives and managing a period shouldn't be a source of stress.

LD 1335 is an important step in recognizing that menstrual products, diapers and toilet paper are necessities rather than luxuries, but more can and needs to be done to address access concerns for vulnerable groups. As policy makers we would encourage you to expand your focus to providing no cost access in public schools, prisons, and homeless shelters where menstrual products may otherwise be completely unavailable or only sporadically available.

Some examples of how other states have expanded access to these products are:

- In 2016, New York City passed an ordinance that guarantees free access to feminine hygiene products for the city's incarcerated women, all women residing in city shelters, all youth under the care of certain Children's Services facilities (including transgender, intersex, and gender non-conforming youth), and public school students. In homeless shelters alone, the ordinance provides people who menstruate with about two million free tampons and 3.5 million pads per year.
- In 2017, Illinois passed the Learn with Dignity Act," which requires free access to feminine hygiene products in all public and charter schools across the state for youth from sixth through twelfth grades.

Making menstrual products, diapers and toilet paper tax exempt and implementing policies to provide free access to them would promote public health and give people their dignity. Thank you for your time and I strongly urge you to vote to pass LD 1335.