

Dear Chair Daughtry, Chair Brennan, and Members of the Committee,

Goodmorning. My name is Maddy Corson, and I am a Maine student who recently helped to lead a months-long initiative which secured free menstrual products directly in the student restrooms of my local high school. I am incredibly fortunate to attend a school with a highly accessible and responsive administration, a supportive group of peers to make great strides towards achieving this goal, and an encouraging community poised with the tools to help sustain this initiative. Unfortunately, not all students are able to access the resources necessary to be successful with this project, a process which can be considerably extensive and frustrating when undertaken personally. Evidently, menstrual products must be made free and accessible to all students, regardless of the unique circumstances which may limit their efforts to individually acquire these products on behalf of their peers. Thus, I respectfully urge you to enact LD #452 so as to empower schools to bridge the gap in educational equity between menstruating and non-menstruating students in Maine.

According to the 2020 “State of the Period” study, a nationally-conducted inquiry commissioned by Thinx and PERIOD, 84% of teens – more than four in every five – reported missing class, or otherwise reported knowing of a peer who had missed class, due to lack of access to menstrual products. Furthermore, the report found that 69% of these students felt ashamed when required to bring menstrual products with them to the restroom, and 51% stated that they felt as though their school did not care about them if free products were not available in school restrooms. As represented by this data, the urgency of this issue is undeniably reflected in my own experience, as well as the experience of fellow classmates, whose mental health and academic performance may suffer from lack of access to menstrual products in schools: the same “State of the Period” study similarly reports that two-thirds of teens have experienced stress due to lack of access to menstrual products.

In addition, I believe, it is of incredible importance to distinguish between menstrual products provided via school offices and nurses versus menstrual products provided to students directly in school restrooms. This essential distinction specified by LD #452 guarantees that the restrooms most frequented by menstruators are as equally equipped as those frequented by non-menstruators. In contrast, necessitating that students request permission to address their own health care needs from an adult staff member ultimately compromises students’ privacy and often causes them to further reduce time spent in the classroom. In particular, the notion that students must access pads and tampons by visiting the school nurse – as if they are ill or unhealthy – sends a negative message towards young students about the connotations surrounding menstruation.

Furthermore, when considered in relation to the availability of other bathroom products, the discrepancy becomes clear: for example, it is not necessary for students to carry their own hand

soap or toilet paper with them between classes. If students forget to bring their own hand soap or toilet paper, however, it is not necessary for them to ask permission for these items from an adult, which would consequently reduce time spent in class. Likewise, it is not argued whether or not students “deserve” free hand soap or toilet paper because it is understood that these bathroom products are an inherent necessity. The same standard, therefore, must be applied to menstrual products in school restrooms.

Already, states such as New York, California, and our own New England neighbor, New Hampshire, have enacted similar legislation. Passing this crucial bill will not only allow our state to follow in the footsteps of these other legislatures, but enable Maine to help pioneer the essential initiative of securing equitable, in-school access to menstrual products across the country and the globe. Lack of accessibility to menstrual products has held menstruating individuals back from assuming their full educational potentials for far too long. LD #452 ultimately enables menstruating students to take charge of their education and claim the equal opportunity of unhindered success at school.

Thank you for your time. I greatly appreciate your consideration of my request to pass LD #452. On behalf of students and menstruators across Maine who may be unable to share their voices before the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs today, I implore you to affirm this vital article of legislation.

Sincerely, and with respect,

Maddy Corson