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**TESTIMONY PRESENTED
BY
MAINE FAMILY PLANNING
IN SUPPORT OF
LD 452: AN ACT TO REQUIRE CERTAIN SCHOOLS TO PROVIDE
MENSTRUAL PRODUCTS**

April 20, 2021

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, I am writing in support of LD 452, "An Act To Require Certain Schools To Provide Menstrual Products.", which would advance [menstrual equity](#) in the state of Maine.

Maine Family Planning provides comprehensive sexual and reproductive health care for adults and teens at 18 clinics statewide and serves as the non-profit administrator of Maine's statewide family planning network, which encompasses roughly 50 providers, including five school-based health centers. This robust network ensures that affordable care is available to more than 28,000 patients each year. Separately, Maine Family Planning's Prevention team supports educators around the state who provide comprehensive sexuality education that's medically accurate, age-appropriate, and affirming for youth of all identities.

As experts in young people's sexual and reproductive health, we know access to menstrual hygiene products in schools is key to health, dignity, and well-being. Products such as pads, pantliners, and tampons are no different than toilet paper and soap -- they are essential items that people who menstruate need to use on a monthly basis. But unlike toilet paper or soap in a school bathroom, menstrual products must be purchased, brought from home or otherwise procured (sometimes at an [unexpected or inconvenient moment](#)), and they are expensive,

costing [hundreds if not thousands of dollars](#) over the course of a person's menstruating life. Furthermore, these essentials continue to be [taxed](#) in a majority of states, including Maine.

A [2019 analysis](#) found that 1 in 5 teens could not afford period products and that 1 in 4 missed class because of it. In a state where nearly 17% of students live under the federal poverty line, there is a real risk of period poverty interfering with educational opportunities and school attendance. And, with the [rate of poverty](#) among Black children in Maine (45.6%) more than three times the rate for non-Hispanic white children (13.5%), that risk is higher for Black students.

Unsurprisingly, the COVID-19 pandemic only exacerbated the challenges of accessing menstrual products. One recent survey [showed](#) nearly half of all people who menstruate worldwide have struggled to access period products during the pandemic. Offering these products in school restrooms could really help students whose families are struggling to afford the basics.

But this is about more than affordability and convenience. This is about reducing stigma around menstruation, normalizing periods, and ensuring that all young Mainers are empowered to know their bodies and take care of their health. According to [the 2019 poll](#), a majority of teens who menstruate reported feelings of shame and/or lack of knowledge about their periods, with fully 80 percent saying they feel a "negative association" with menstruation and 79 percent reporting a need for more in-depth education around menstrual health. Notably, 51 percent of students said they "feel like their school does not care about them if they don't provide free period products in the bathrooms." Forcing a trip to the school health center or nurse just to ask for a tampon only increases the potential for embarrassment or emotional anxiety.

It's well past time to normalize the regular functions of all bodies. Providing menstrual products in school bathrooms could go a long way toward alleviating both stigma and stress for students who menstruate.

We urge the committee to pass LD 452 and move Maine closer to [menstrual equity](#), a term coined by author Jennifer Weiss-Wolf and described in her book, "Periods Gone Public," as such: "In order to have a fully equitable and participatory society, we must have laws and policies that ensure menstrual products are safe and affordable for everyone who needs them. The ability to access these items affects a person's freedom to work, study, stay healthy, and engage in the world with basic dignity. And if anyone's access is compromised, whether by poverty or stigma or lack of education and resources, it is in our societal interest to ensure those needs are met."

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony.

Sincerely,

George A. Hill
President/CEO