



Montgomery County Community Action Board Testimony

County Council Bill 42-23: Health and Sanitation - Menstrual Products in Public Restrooms – Required SUPPORT

The Montgomery County Community Action Board, the federal, state, and locally designated anti-poverty group, strongly supports County Council Bill 42-23, which focuses on ensuring access to menstrual products in public restrooms. This crucial legislation reflects a commitment to promoting public health, hygiene, and gender equity within our community.

Access to menstrual products is a basic human right, and it directly impacts the well-being and dignity of individuals who menstruate. Unfortunately, the lack of available products in public restrooms can lead to significant challenges for those who unexpectedly find themselves without the necessary supplies. The legislation is an excellent first step in addressing a lesser-known poverty: period poverty, which is the term used for those struggling to access menstrual hygiene products. Period poverty disproportionately affects low-income individuals, students, and others who may face financial barriers to purchasing these products regularly as we know that they are not covered by SNAP or any other benefits. A 2021 study from Kotex demonstrated that 2 in 5 people struggle to afford supplies, and with recent inflation it is believed that number is even higher.¹ Not having access to hygiene supplies causes people to miss work or school, impacting their quality of life.

Period poverty can be especially challenging in an area like Montgomery County where the cost of living is so high. The 2023 Montgomery County Self-Sufficiency Standard for a household with one adult, one preschooler, and one school age child is an annual income of \$116,864 – over four and a half times the federal poverty level.² This adult is spending close to half of their income on housing and child care alone. Less than 8% of their income can be allocated for miscellaneous items – a category that includes menstrual hygiene products, along with other critical necessities such as clothing, internet access, and a cell phone.

By mandating the provision of menstrual products in public restrooms, Bill 42-23 addresses a fundamental aspect of public health and sanitation. Menstrual hygiene is essential for preventing infections and maintaining overall well-being. By taking this proactive step, our county can contribute to the creation of a more inclusive and supportive environment for everyone, regardless of gender and can become a leader in the State and join the many other jurisdictions across the country who are already providing these supplies to their constituents.

¹ <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2023/08/09/opinion/its-dignity-issue-inside-movement-tackling-period-poverty-us/>

² <https://maryland-cap.org/the-maryland-2023-self-sufficiency-standard-calculator/>

Moreover, ensuring access to menstrual products in public restrooms aligns with broader efforts to break down barriers and reduce stigma surrounding menstruation, and address economic inequality as these products would be available to any menstruating person. This bill sends a powerful message that our community values the health and dignity of all its members, regardless of gender identity or socioeconomic status.

The Board applauds the County Council for opening up this important conversation and prioritizing such an important piece of legislation. We urge you to vote in favor of Bill 42-23, contributing to the well-being and equality of all individuals within our community. Together, we can create a more inclusive County for everyone.

Thank you for your time and consideration.