



Maine Women's Lobby

THE VOICE OF MAINE WOMEN

April 20, 2021

Dear Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

I join you today on behalf of the Maine Women's Lobby. For over forty years, the Maine Women's Lobby has advocated for public policy which increases the health, wellness, safety, and economic security of Maine women and girls, with a focus on the most marginalized populations and communities. We are here **in support of LD 452, "An Act To Require Certain Schools To Provide Menstrual Products,"** and thank Representative Tepler for sponsoring this important bill.

Menstrual equity – that is, the ability for everyone who needs them to be able to access safe and affordable period products – is an issue of gender equity. Over half the population menstruates for much of our lives, and it is as normal and natural as any other bodily function. Yet we still know that many Mainers cannot access these essential products. Because of the stigma associated with periods, good data is hard to find, but we know that organizations in Maine such as *One Less Worry* and *I Support the Girls* gather and distribute over 100,000 pads and tampons at several dozen sites in our state each year – a clear indication of the need.

When people can't access essential needs, they have to resort to reusing products, using them for longer than indicated, using items not intended as period products, or skipping school or work. These alternatives can pose serious risks to health and hygiene as well as educational and economic security.

This disproportionate impact overwhelmingly affects women, girls, marginalized populations such as incarcerated individuals, and low-income people. It places additional harm on already vulnerable Mainers, and [in some states](#) this impact has been viewed as sex-based discrimination. We are aware that not every person who menstruates identifies as a woman or girl. However, the vast majority of people with periods are women and girls; it's hard not to notice the connections between period-shame or stigma and sexism. In the same way that other health needs which are primarily for women and girls – such as reproductive care and pregnancy or post-partum care – are seen as 'add-ons' or optional, period products have long been treated as something individuals should address, rather than embraced as a normal human function. Toilet paper is freely accessible in school bathrooms. Period products should be as well.

Title IX, part of the Education Amendments of the United States Civil Rights Act, protects every individual from being excluded from the benefits of publicly funded



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education. Some young Mainers – almost all of whom are female – are skipping school, missing class, or putting their health in danger due to lack of access to basic needs products. In these cases, economic insecurity, sex, and stigma have teamed up to make school harder to navigate for some people. LD 452 is a way to address that need and make school safer and more accessible for all. We hope you will vote **'yes' on LD 452.**

Sincerely,

Destie Hohman Sprague, Executive Director
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