



new hampshire

WOMEN'S FOUNDATION

To: Chairman Mel Myler and the House Education Committee

Re: Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 142

Date: April 3, 2019

Position: OUGHT TO PASS

Background

The New Hampshire Women's Foundation invests in equality and opportunity for women and girls through research, education, advocacy, and philanthropy. There are few, if any, issues that so acutely highlight gender disparity than the economic and health costs of menstruation, pregnancy prevention and childbearing. While we seem to openly discuss access to birth control and maternity care and the costs associated with them in the public health and public policy arena, as a society we have a shyness, or in some instances a stigma, when it comes to speaking openly about menstruation and the monthly hardship it can present for women and girls. This bill is part of a larger public conversation that is emerging in the policy arena and non-profit sector toward lessening this financial and medical inequity which is often referred to as "*Period Poverty*". And schools are a critical place to offer a publicly supported intervention.

The Cost of Menstrual Hygiene Products Can Present Economic Hardship for Young Women

Women who experience menstruation know how uncomfortable periods can be. Now imagine not being able to afford basic necessities like sanitary pads or tampons. It is estimated that the cost of obtaining one month's supply of menstrual care products averages \$7 – 10 per female in a household. For many low-income households, especially those with more than one female of reproductive age, this expense can present a real hardship and for some the situation is so dire that it results in them skipping school for several days each month – a pattern sure to reinforce the cycle of poverty.

Poor Menstrual Health and Hygiene Are Predictors of Longer-Term Medical Problems

When forced to deal with their periods without an adequate supply of hygiene products, young women resort to using rags, socks or reusing sanitary pads beyond their recommended duration. Over an extended span of time these survival tactics can increase risk of urinary tract infections, vaginal infections, cervical cancer and toxic shock syndrome. Some of these conditions also contribute to infertility.

Related Shame and Isolation Can Limit Educational and Economic Attainment for Low-Income Girls

A recent survey of Confidence in Puberty¹ among teenage girls revealed that nearly one in five American girls have either left school early or missed school entirely because they did not have access to period products. At puberty, a girl's confidence plummets, with the onset of menstruation marking the lowest moment for many girls. But the drop in confidence is much worse for girls that lack access to menstrual supplies. It can force her to miss out on important confidence-building activities in the classroom, on the athletic field, and in extra-curricular programming. Missing out on this crucial learning and development will limit her potential far beyond puberty.

While lack of access to menstrual hygiene products has typically been associated with girls in other countries, this *Period Poverty* is also happening right here in the United States and here in New Hampshire.

Conclusion

The New Hampshire Women's Foundation encourages your support for this bill and will be pleased to work further with legislators toward its enactment. We thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and urge you to vote favorably on this proposal.

Respectfully Submitted

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¹ Always Confidence and Puberty Study, Nov. 2017; based on females 16-24 years old; 2016 U.S. census.