



Testimony submitted to the Joint Committee on Public Health
In Support of H.1959/ S.1274 An Act to increase access to disposable menstrual products in prisons,
homeless shelters, and public schools
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The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts supports H.1959/S.1274, An Act to increase access to disposable menstrual products in prisons, homeless shelters, and public schools, because effective menstrual hygiene management is a matter of equity. By requiring that free, easily accessible sanitary products be available in schools, prisons and shelters, this legislation addresses a basic need shared by menstruating adults and adolescents, regardless of income, across the Commonwealth.

H.1959/S.1274 eliminates a barrier to a free and appropriate education for students and protects the dignity and health of teenagers, imprisoned individuals and those using homeless shelters. This legislation aligns with LWVMA's belief that humane conditions must exist in prisons, along with rehabilitative opportunities and programs, in order to maximize the likelihood of restoration of prisoners. Since LWVMA is in favor of laws that promote social and economic justice, the health and safety of all Americans and equal access to quality education for all, we encourage your support of H.1959/S.1274 as a humane response to a fundamental need for certain Massachusetts citizens.

Most menstruating individuals menstruate each month.¹ An individual's period may begin in the classroom, in the gym, in a prison cell, on a park bench, in a shelter or wherever the individual happens to be. Often this event comes as a surprise. Whether menstruation is expected or not, a lack of access to menstrual hygiene products may force the individual to improvise by rolling up wads of toilet paper, using part of a baby's diaper or blanket, or fashioning protection out of a t-shirt or socks. Then the individual must figure out what to do with these used materials.

In some cases, individuals cannot improvise and will choose to skip their activities for the day. For students, this means missing school and, as a result, disrupting their studies. For others, this means missing other important commitments. For some, appropriate menstrual hygiene management means bargaining for these products at the risk of exploitation. In other cases, menstruating individuals simply suffer the indignity of soiled clothing.

Studies show that the annual cost of sanitary products can be prohibitive.² For individuals living in poverty - and statistics show these are most often women³ - this high cost can force difficult

¹ <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/fast-facts-nine-things-you-didnt-know-about-menstruation>. Accessed September 19, 2019.

² In a recent study, nearly two-thirds of low-income women in St. Louis, MO reported being unable to afford menstrual hygiene management products when they needed them at some point during the previous year, with 21% percent lacking supplies on a monthly basis.



choices. For mothers – do I buy food and other basics for my family or sanitary products for myself? For a woman in prison – what must I trade to get the products that I need? For the homeless person – will I be forced to steal in order to have sanitary products?

H.1959/S.1274 would require grade 6-12 schools, prisons and homeless shelters to make menstrual products available in an easily accessible manner and without cost to menstruating individuals. For students, this legislation would eliminate the need to request permission to go to the nurse's office because the products would be available in bathrooms and locker rooms. Similarly, in prisons and homeless shelters the products would be easily available. Compassion and a desire to treat citizens equally require the Commonwealth to adopt this approach.

LWVMA understands that there is a cost associated with this legislation and hopes that a funding source can be identified to support the implementation of this critical bill. The League, which represents 47 local Leagues from Cape Cod to the Berkshires, urges you to report H.1959/S.1274 favorably.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

https://journals.lww.com/greenjournal/Fulltext/2019/02000/Unmet_Menstrual_Hygiene_Needs_Among_Low_Income.2.aspx .
Accessed September 20, 2019.

³ *The Shriver Report: A Woman's Nation Pushes Back from the Brink.*
<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/economy/reports/2014/01/12/81906/the-shriver-report-a-womans-nation-pushes-back-from-the-brink/>. Accessed September 19, 2019.

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