

Public Health Committee

S.B. 140: AN ACT REQUIRING FREE FEMININE HYGIENE PRODUCTS IN MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT BATHROOMS.

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The Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF) is a statewide, nonprofit organization that advocates for and empowers women and girls in Connecticut, especially those who are underserved or marginalized. For forty-six years, CWEALF has been a leading advocate of policy solutions that enhance women's economic security, educational equity, and sexual and reproductive health and rights.

CWEALF encourages the Committee to support Senate Bill No. 140: *An Act Requiring Free Feminine Hygiene Products in Middle and High School Student Bathrooms*. Free menstrual products in middle and high schools will ensure fewer students miss school due to their periods, support students to complete their school work and eliminate period stigma, and continue to educate students on sexual and reproductive health. CWEALF also encourages the Committee to consider a language revision, from "feminine hygiene products" to "menstrual products."

While menstrual products are a necessity for people in Connecticut who have periods, they are often unaffordable and inaccessible, especially for students who are low-income or who experience homelessness. Access to free menstrual products at school alleviates financial concerns associated with having to buy products. Although the "tampon tax" no longer exists in Connecticut, menstrual products still remain an additional cost to Connecticut residents who experience poverty, as SNAP and Medicaid benefits do not cover menstrual products. Free menstrual products in schools will provide low-income students and students who experience homelessness with basic sanitation, reducing financial concerns and eliminating the need for students to create makeshift menstrual products that are not sanitary and can be detrimental to their health.

Discourse surrounding periods and menstrual products is taboo, despite the fact that periods are a normal and healthy bodily function. Many middle and high school students may feel shame from their peers, or even school faculty, when asking for help if they have their period. Some students may even feel like they must leave school when they have their period to avoid ridicule and embarrassment, thus missing their school work. Open availability of menstrual products sends an important message that normalizes periods and allows students to easily access the products they need, which limits disruption to their school day and removes opportunities for other students' or faculty's ridicule.

CWEALF also encourages the Committee to consider a change in language to the title of S.B. 140. Defining menstrual products as “feminine hygiene products” excludes from this discussion students who do not identify as female, including transgender and nonbinary students, who still have periods. This simple adjustment of language ensures inclusivity in the conversation surrounding access to menstrual products.

CWEALF urges the Committee to support Senate Bill No. 140: *An Act Requiring Free Feminine Hygiene Products in Middle and High School Student Bathrooms*. Connecticut students deserve to have their basic needs met, including access to menstrual products, to receive their education without ridicule and stigma, and to have a voice in the discussions surrounding their health.