

Public Health Committee

H.B.5272: *An Act Concerning Menstrual Products.*

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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-eight 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 H.B. 5272: *An Act Concerning Menstrual Products*. Connecticut should provide free menstrual products in Correctional facilities, all publicly funded schools and shelters to ensure fewer individuals suffer from the effects of menstrual inequity. The lack of menstrual equity is an issue of poverty, health, education, housing instability and human dignity¹ and has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

While menstrual products are a necessity for all Connecticut residents who have periods, they are often unaffordable and inaccessible, especially for people who are low-income or who experience homelessness. One in eight menstruators between the ages of 12 and 44 live below the federal poverty levels in Connecticut². Individuals who have a menstrual cycle can spend upwards of \$1000 over the course of their life on menstrual products³. Menstrual inequity disproportionately affects Black and Latinx individuals. In a study 23% of Black and 24% of Latinx people acknowledged that they struggled to afford menstrual products⁴. When menstruators cannot afford menstrual products they often turn to unhygienic practices.

Individuals who are housing insecure are particularly affected by menstrual inequity. Individuals who are without stable housing often struggle to access menstrual products because they are unaffordable and are not always available in shelters⁵. The lack of access to menstrual products can lead to unhygienic practices such as using tampons and pad longer than recommended or improvising with paper towels and newspaper, which can often lead to infections⁶. Providing shelters with menstrual products can create menstrual equity for housing insecure individuals.

Menstrual inequity does not only affect adults who menstruate, but teenagers as well. One in five American teenagers' live in poverty lack menstrual products; this often disrupts educational opportunities⁷. In Connecticut 39% of female students in public schools grades 7-12 attend Title

¹ ACLU. (n.d.). The unequal price of periods. American Civil Liberties Union., from <https://www.aclu.org/report/unequal-price-period>

² The Diaper Bank Of Connecticut. (2022). *Menstrual Equity Legislative Toolkit.pdf*. thediaperbank.org.

³ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/18mQs8wgH2ezj4vy5aFe2dQs8NUN2CeSM/view>

⁴ Ibid p. 2

⁵ Diaper Bank p. 2

⁶ ACLU p.3

⁷ Ibid p.1

⁸ Ibid p.1

I eligible schools⁸. Not only do the students who cannot afford menstrual products often miss school, but suffer from the mental stigma associated with periods⁹. Students should be able to attend class without worrying about how their menstrual cycle may affect their learning. Free menstrual products in restrooms in public educational facilities, such as middle schools, high schools, and public higher education institutions, will foster menstrual equity.

To create menstrual equity CWEALF supports de-stigmatizing access to menstrual products in prisons and we urge the Department of Corrections to ensure everyone who needs menstrual products has access to them.

CWEALF also supports H.B. 5272's language of "menstrual products" rather than "feminine hygiene products". Defining menstrual products as "feminine hygiene products" excludes from this discussion individuals who do not identify as female, including transgender and nonbinary individuals , who still have periods¹⁰. This simple adjustment of language ensures inclusivity in the conversation surrounding access to menstrual products.

CWEALF urges the Committee to support H.B. 5272: *An Act Concerning Menstrual Products*. Connecticut residents deserve access to menstrual products, along with other basic needs products, at central locations that support their health and well-being.

⁸ Diaperbank p. 2

⁹ Farrar, K., & Ren, J. (2022, February 17). We can end period poverty. CT Mirror. Retrieved from <https://ctmirror.org/2022/02/18/we-can-end-period-poverty/>

¹⁰ Diaperbank, P. 2