

Regarding: Testimony in support of HB 1282

Jan 17, 2023

My name is Dr. Andrea Huseh-Zosel and I am writing to state my support of HB 1282 to remove the tax on menstrual products. I am an Associate Professor in the Department of Public Health at North Dakota State University (NDSU), and have taught and conducted research on public health issues, including menstrual product access, for nearly eight years. I would like to make clear that the views expressed in this letter are not on behalf of NDSU.

Menstruation is a universal experience. Nearly two billion people worldwide are of menstruating age, and 300 million have their period on any given day (Zivi, 2020). On average, women spend 3,500 days of their lives menstruating (Zivi, 2020).

Period poverty is a real concern in the United States. Period poverty is the inability to access menstrual hygiene products, either because they are just not available, or because individual cannot afford to purchase them (Sommer & Mason, 2021). Menstrual hygiene management (MHM) necessitates acceptable access to needed menstrual supplies. In the United States, nearly one quarter of women had difficulty buying menstrual hygiene products in the past year (Alliance for Period Supplies, 2018). One-fifth of women and girls report missing school or work due to a lack of menstrual supplies (Alliance for Period Supplies, 2018). Among low-income women, 64% report being unable to afford menstrual hygiene products in the past year, while 21% report struggling to purchase supplies monthly (Kuhlmann et al., 2019). Exacerbating issues of access, menstrual products are not covered by federal assistance programs in the United States including the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Women report using a variety of materials as substitutes for menstrual products when they do not have access to supplies, such as cloth rags, tissue, toilet paper, paper towels, and diapers. Being unable to sufficiently manage menstruation restricts participation in society, contributes to higher rates of school absenteeism and missed activities, and perpetuates gender inequities (Houston et al., 2006; Sommer et al., 2016).

Myself and a colleague from NDSU recently conducted research on the menstruation experiences of middle and high school students in Fargo, and also surveyed Fargo Public School teachers in grades 5-12 to get their perspectives on the experiences of their students experiencing menstruation at school.

More than 13% of teachers surveyed stated they had at least 5 students ask them for assistance with their period during the school year including providing support such as provision of menstrual products including pads and/or tampons. Almost half of the teachers surveyed stated they had menstrual products on hand in case of student need, and of those, more than half stated they purchased the products themselves.

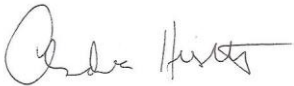
Prior to 2020, menstrual products were not available for student use in any of the school bathrooms in the Fargo school district. Focus groups conducted with middle and high school students illuminated the issues associated with the lack of access to menstrual products within schools, including some participants reporting having to leave school because they did not have menstrual supplies if they experienced their period during the school day. Since 2020, grant funding provided funds to install 2 menstrual product dispensers in each middle school and high school in Fargo – but this is not enough to provide dispensers in each bathroom. Imagine being told that toilet paper is only going to be provided in

half of the bathrooms in a given school building, and that you should “be prepared” by carrying your own toilet paper with you “just in case.” Providing a tax exemption for menstrual products would free up additional funds for additional menstrual products to be made available within the schools.

Having access to affordable menstrual products is a very real need. Providing a tax exemption for feminine hygiene products is vital to making menstrual products affordable and thereby more accessible for women and girls in North Dakota.

I hope you will consider my testimony and vote for HB 1282. Thank you.

Sincerely~

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrea Huseth-Zosel". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Andrea Huseth-Zosel