

Martha Boeckel
Testimony in support of HB1282
ND House Finance and Taxation Committee
January 18, 2023

Chairman Headland and Members of the Committee:

Good morning. My name is Marty Boeckel, and I am here in support of HB1282.

I speak to you as a mother of three, a grandmother to five, and one who has dedicated my life to giving children the tools they need to succeed.

My work background includes serving six years as CEO of the Girl Scouts of Sakakawea Council, where I worked on behalf of hundreds of girls in a 13-county area in North and South Dakota.

In other work, I was part of a successful federal policy initiative that led to violence ratings on every television program. It remains a great safeguard to families today.

Over the past three years, I've been a volunteer and certified Ambassador of Women's Health with Days for Girls (DfG) International. Days for Girls is an award-winning NGO that works to shatter stigma and limitations associated with menstruation for improved health, education and livelihood outcomes. To date, DfG has reached more than 2.7 million women and girls in 144 countries on 6 continents with quality, sustainable menstrual solutions and health education. My work includes providing health education and partnering with governments, coalitions and other development stakeholders to advance global menstrual equity.

To that end, today I am here to talk about menstrual equity in North Dakota, and ways we can work together to achieve it.

Most recent US Census data shows that 48 percent of North Dakota's population is female. Of those approximately 372,000 women, nearly 54 percent are between the ages of 10 and 49. In other words, 197,000 women and girls within our State's borders are menstruating. Data also shows that over 11 percent of North Dakotans live in poverty.

Over her lifetime, a woman has, on an average, 35 years of having a period every month. That equals 2,500 days, each requiring the need for approximately 6-8 products. That's \$8 to \$10 per month for each person. The price quickly adds up, and so does the sales tax. From an equity standpoint, one can easily see the tax adds insult to injury.

Period poverty exists right here in North Dakota. What is period poverty? It is a lack of access to menstrual solutions, or lack of resources to purchase those solutions. I'll be candid. I had not clearly seen the burden created by taxing these products. But now I know, and I cannot look away.

Women and girls need menstrual products to be able to manage their periods safely, hygienically and with dignity. A recent Harris Poll of 1000 U.S. teens ages 13 to 19 suggests that while economic barriers to products are significant, cultural and structural obstacles are also largely to blame. Why do I point this out? Because you, as legislators, can make a big difference by making a small change for girls and women in this state. While the price may seem small to you, the statement it makes is huge when it comes to public awareness and progress toward menstrual equity.

Over the past year and a half, I have partnered with the Youth Action Council of the ND Women's Network to improve access to menstrual solutions. With our Period Pack events around the state, we have made donations of products and distributions possible through school nurses,

teachers, clinics and homeless shelters. In this way, we help ensure women and girls have the products they need, when they need it.

Will eliminating the tax eliminate the problem? No. But it will help. Women and girls do not have a choice whether they get a period or not. Tampons and pads are necessities for people who menstruate. Period taxes are discriminatory because they effectively tax women and girls who have no choice but to buy menstrual products. They are a health-related expense, NOT a luxury item. Even though it might not be intended, taxing these items is tantamount to sex-based discrimination.

Twenty-three states are ahead of ND in the effort to eliminate tax on period products. Twenty-seven states still tax these products, North Dakota being one of them.

I respectfully appeal to your sense of fairness and ask you to join the movement.

Together, we CAN make a difference.

I urge a DO PASS on HB1282.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter.