



Senate Education Committee - February 4th, 2020, 3:00 pm

Testimony on S.323 [Proposed Sec. 1. 16 V.S.A. §1432.]

- (a) A school district shall make menstrual hygiene products available at no cost in all gender-neutral bathrooms and bathrooms designated for females located in public high schools. As used in this chapter, "menstrual hygiene products" includes sanitary napkins and tampons.*
- (b) The school district shall bear the cost of supplying menstrual hygiene products. A school district may seek grants or partner with a nonprofit or community-based organization to fulfill this obligation.*

The Vermont State School Nurses' Association (VSSNA) supports the bill to provide menstrual hygiene products in schools at no cost to students, however, we have concerns regarding:

1. The proposed language
2. The logistical details in financing such a supply of products
3. The responsibilities of health education around use and disposal of these products.

Regarding Section *(a) A school district shall make menstrual hygiene products available at no cost in all gender-neutral bathrooms and bathrooms designated for females located in public high schools.*

1. Since girls reach menarche as young as 8 years old and as late as 19 years old, we recommend *elementary and middle schools* be added to the language of this bill.
2. We would encourage the Vermont Legislature to *consider broader language to allow the distribution of these products be implemented in a way that works best for each individual school.*
3. We do have concerns around specific language requiring *"placement in all gender-neutral and female bathrooms."*
 - a. Many schools are also used for community events and meetings, so if the language remained broad enough for schools to decide on specific bathrooms to house the products then they could have some control to ensure the products remain stocked for students.

- b. There are certain bathrooms where the plumbing does not allow for accidental flushing of these items, so the facilities managers of each school, who know these systems intimately, could be a part of the school team who decides which bathrooms these items will be placed in.
 - c. By specifying specific gendered bathrooms, it prevents the larger conversation to educate and normalize the natural process of menstruation for all humans, regardless of gender.
4. We would humbly suggest that Section (a) contain broad language similar to that of the NY Legislature Public Health Law 267 passed last week which reads,
- Feminine hygiene products in schools. All elementary and secondary public schools in the state ...shall provide feminine hygiene products in the restrooms of such school building or buildings. Such products shall be provided at no charge to students.***
5. We encouraged the Vermont legislature to add language ***“feminine hygiene products will be stocked not only in bathrooms but also in school health offices.”***
- a. *There is a disconnect between using products and being educated about them.*
 - i. Assumption that parents have conversations around menstruation,
 - ii. Assumption that students get this information in health class
 - iii. Some students never have this conversation at home or in the classroom
 - iv. For some students, the first time they learn about menstruation is upon visiting the school nurse the first time they get their period.
 - b. It is upon receiving feminine hygiene products from the school nurse in a safe office space that students receive the appropriate education around their female reproductive systems and the products of pads and tampons.
6. Perhaps more thought and language is required around posting educational resources near the provided products about how to use them properly as well as encouraging students to speak to the school nurse or trusted adult if they have any questions.

Regarding Section (b) *The school district shall bear the cost of supplying menstrual hygiene products. A school district may seek grants or partner with a nonprofit or community-based organization to fulfill this obligation.*

- 1. School nurses across the country already partner with various programs and community organizations to supply these products to students.
 - a. For schools who sign up, Proctor & Gamble’s program for schools supplies a lesson plan and a sample pack of supplies for each female student in the school. The rest of the pads and tampons supplied in

- schools are bought with nursing budget funds or donated by churches (mostly in Southern states).
- b. Current stock in the nurse's office is not equivalent to stocking every bathroom in every school.
 - c. Perhaps adding language to the bill allowing schools to fundraise for these supplies might help defray costs for already budget-tight systems in place.
 - d. There are no other organizations that we know of that currently partner with schools in Vermont for these supplies.
2. Schools are places charged with teaching students about the world so they can successfully live in it independently.
- a. This bill is one step to help the period poverty crisis and increase student attendance.
 - b. Other means of legislation are required to provide human dignity to those suffering from period poverty.
 - c. Providing free pads to students in schools is merely a small chip in the greater issue of period poverty.
 - d. We would support further legislation to look at other ways to address period poverty.
 - i. legislation to ensure these items are not taxed
 - ii. legislation to provide a stamp system by which people who qualify for food stamps could buy feminine and dental products.

We applaud you for seeking input on this important legislation from Vermont School Nurses.

Respectfully submitted,

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