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Menstrual Product Accessibility in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania School Systems

Problem

The U.S. has made strides in creating legislation across nearly half of the 50 states¹ relating to the provision of free menstrual products in schools. Pennsylvania, under Governor Shapiro's 2024-2025 Menstrual Hygiene Product Grant Program, documents a federally mandated budget of 3 million dollars² toward bridging the menstrual health gap in these learning spaces. Despite the state's approval and confirmation of funding in Jan. 2025, **the state does not have legislation enforcing schools to utilize this budget.** In fact, many schools across Allegheny County in Pennsylvania³ are not phasing out menstrual products despite having the funds.⁴ Additionally, where menstrual products are being rolled out, some institutions are locating them solely outside of restrooms, in spaces like administrative or nurses offices. Taking students out of a private space where they most need to have access to menstrual products, and forcing them into often uncomfortable situations does not equate to accessibility. Student-led initiatives like Girl Up or Reproductive rights clubs, while impactful, bear the brunt of a responsibility that was meant first on the healthcare systems with the support of students, not conversely.

This proposal seeks to address the accessibility of menstrual health products in bathrooms for schools in Allegheny County with goal of:

- 1.) Enforcing schools to use budget approved funds to implement free menstrual health products in their institutions.
- 2.) Ensuring menstrual products are specifically first placed inside of bathrooms, in addition to other locations the administration may allow

Solution

This reform proposal seeks to create a Menstrual Equity Program or subcommittee for Allegheny County to ensure the above two outlined goals are being met. This program will conduct research and outreach support to solidify that schools in the county are

¹ <https://allianceforperiodsupplies.org/period-products-in-schools/>

² <https://www.pa.gov/content/dam/copapwp-pagov/en/health/documents/topics/documents/school-health/Menstrual%20Hygiene%20Product%20School%20Funding.pdf> ;

³ Allegheny County, found in Pittsburgh PA, is composed of 43 school districts.

⁴ https://www.pa.gov/agencies/education/newsroom/getting-stuff-done-shapiro-administration-delivers-funding-for-free-period-products-to-all-pennsylvania-school-districts?utm_source=chatgpt.com

effectively using their funding as well as strategizing logistics for schools struggling to implement products inside of their bathrooms.

This plan is effective in that it's not calling for an entirely new proposition or bill to be put into place, and rather is focused on optimizing community and emphasizing resources that are already available to school districts with the help of an organized group.

While subcommittees specifically designed for this implementation side of menstrual health products and healthcare in schools is not very common, programs ensuring period products are inside of school bathrooms at a legislative level is already occurring in other North Eastern states. A 2023 AP News report finds that New Jersey's Governor signed and has implemented a bill that has provided nearly 1,400 New Jersey schools, with grades 6-12, free menstrual products in female and non gender confirmed restrooms.⁵ Looking not much further from this Pittsburgh District, Pennsylvania's Lackawanna County has made serious progress utilizing the funding and creating "No Touch, No Charge," menstrual product vending machines in bathrooms and in school nurse offices. Finally, looking within Allegheny county, schools like North Allegheny School district have optimized their refunding and installed menstrual product vending machines as well in not just high school bathrooms but also at the younger middle school levels as well.⁶

Implementation Strategy

Implementation can start first at the local level. As noted before, youth-led initiatives are eager and have already mobilized in the form clubs and student-led chapters to draw attention to equity solutions regarding menstrual health. Students involved in these initiatives can reach out to District representatives to voice their support for this program, with outreach going to Allegheny County's District 12 Representative Summer Lee who has already expressed support of Menstrual Health resourcing⁷ or the 17th District representative Chris Deluzio. Next, Allegheny County can seek support from nonprofits focused on period poverty and menstrual health resources like the Pennsylvania Diaper Bank⁸ and SisterFriend Inc.⁹ Finally, seeing as Governor Shapiro is the one who created this grant program, the subcommittee program could be detailed to him for more state wide support.

⁵ <https://apnews.com/article/period-menstrual-products-schools-new-jersey-fbd440958a6865a2c9048db7addc76b>
⁶ https://www.pa.gov/agencies/education/newsroom/getting-stuff-done-shapiro-administration-delivers-funding-for-free-period-products-to-all-pennsylvania-school-districts?utm_source=chatgpt.com; See "Mary Ann Chindemi of Lackawanna County" & "Bridgett Belinski of North Allegheny School District."

⁷ <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/3646/text>

⁸ <https://www.wpadiaperbank.org/period-product-distribution>

⁹ <https://www.sisterfriend.org/>

