



## **Somerville High S.A.F.E.T.Y.**

### **Starting a Movement/Closing a Movement**

“Free the Tampon” Arrives in Greater Boston  
High school students fight for access, win superintendent’s approval

Another battle has been won in the move to make tampons and menstrual pads standard in public restrooms. This time, the site of the victory was a high school in Massachusetts. Three students at Somerville High spearheaded the effort, and convinced the superintendent to approve installing dispensing units throughout the school’s restrooms.

One of the students was prompted to act when she grew tired of jumping through hoops to get the supplies she needed when her period arrived unexpectedly. It first required an uncomfortable conversation with her teacher, then crisscrossing the school to the nurse’s office where tampons were stored, then finally trekking to the bathroom. She realized if the tampons were just kept in the restroom, it would require only a simple bathroom break instead of the full-scale production it turned into. She was also tired of having to lug her purse with her to the bathroom, advertising to everyone in class that she was menstruating.

“I kept asking myself, ‘Why do we only have tampons and pads stored in the nurse’s office? Why are they not openly available in the location we need them right away: the bathrooms?’”

Thus, a movement was born. This student joined with her friends, gathered hundreds of signatures, and presented them to the school board. They also made a video that captured their experience, making clear the inequity of their bathroom experience.

They were heard.

The effort was approved in spring 2017 and installation of menstrual care product dispensers has already occurred. HOSPECO was the proud manufacturer, but this

story belongs to the girls.

These young women didn't know it at the time, but they are part of a larger movement that's taking place across the country to "Free the Tampon," to make menstrual products widely available in public restrooms just like toilet paper, soap, and paper towels.

New York City, a frequent scene of moments that galvanize social change, led the way in summer 2016 when Mayor Bill de Blasio signed legislation making free menstrual products available in all the city's public schools, shelters, and correctional facilities. As a result, the High School for the Arts and Business in Queens was the first public high school to get dispensing machines in every women's restroom.

"Can you imagine any public restroom without toilet paper, seat covers, paper towels, or soap? HOSPECO believes that menstrual care products are necessities, too. Through our Period Partner initiative, we hope to generate a change in away-from-home restrooms," said Bill Hemann, HOSPECO vice president of sales and marketing. "People who menstruate should be able to find readily accessible tampons and pads in restrooms outside the home. Any facility owner unsure there is a movement afoot is encouraged to poke around Google or look at our own collected material by searching #PeriodPartner."

It's been a long time coming, as that student from Somerville summed up. "[Menstruation] is something that happens to women. It's not a disease. It happens to everybody, and it's important for everyone to understand."