



Ann Arbor becomes 1st US city to require menstrual products in all public bathrooms

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A new Ann Arbor ordinance requires all public bathrooms to provide sanitary products, including pads and tampons, to users at no cost — and it's believed to be the first city in the United States to do so.

The new ordinance, effective Jan. 1, 2022, applies to all public restrooms under the plumbing code, not just municipal buildings, and without regard to gender designation.

"Access to menstrual products is a fundamental human necessity," said Ann Arbor Mayor Christopher Taylor. "It's a matter of public health and personal dignity. And it's something that should be provided to everyone."

The ordinance, which passed through Ann Arbor City Council unanimously on Monday, also ensures that other sanitary products, including toilet paper, soap, paper towels and water, are also provided.

Other cities have similar measures, ones that just apply to municipal buildings or in schools, but none have been as all-encompassing.

Taylor said the inspiration to propose the measure came after a young resident of Ann Arbor came to him with the idea.

"A high school student came to me to express her concern that persons without established residences had difficulty obtaining menstrual products," he said. "And that got me to thinking over time, there have been some advances with respect to schools, particularly in Illinois and New York in government buildings. California has got one as well. And I asked staff to look and see whether we could obligate ... all public restrooms in Ann Arbor provide the supplies because they're basic and fundamental for people.

"We can and we did."



This comes amid a move to make period products more accessible and affordable across the state. Earlier this month, Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer signed the "tampon tax" bill, which exempts products like pads and tampons from certain taxes.

Taylor said the ordinance should not cost the city or businesses much money and that it's an opportunity with low costs that will achieve a "social good."

University of Michigan senior Olivia Hintz is president of The Dot Org, a student organization that works to destigmatize periods and provide accessible products to communities throughout Washtenaw County. Her organization has worked with Ann Arbor businesses and U-M to keep bathrooms stocked with menstrual products, she said.

"Those were always a huge hit," Hintz said. "We put feedback forms out and people would only give us positive feedback, saying 'these are so necessary,' or 'I really needed this today,' and 'I didn't have one otherwise.' "

Taylor noted that many stakeholders and organizations throughout the city supported the move before the vote.

"People without established residences live their daily life just like all of us, they have the same bodily necessities as all of us, and their access to supplies that many of us don't give a second thought to is difficult," he said. "And so the provision of basic sanitation supplies in all public restrooms in Ann Arbor will be, for them, an important life improving measure."

Although Hintz said many people get uncomfortable talking about periods, it's necessary. It's a natural bodily function, she said, and sometimes, the alternative to providing free tampons and pads is forcing people to free-bleed.

"You're asking for just essential resources to take care of your body, it takes away a lot of power that you should always have," Hintz said. "You should always have the power to take care of your body and be able to take care of your basic hygiene. When you're not able to do that, just no human should have to go through that."