



Dallas City Hall Targets Period Poverty



A city pilot program found that nearly half of the people who received free menstrual products at libraries and other public buildings had reported missing work or school because they didn't have access to those items. Dallas wants to change that.

By Bethany Erickson | October 18, 2022

Last May, the city of Dallas provided libraries and other public buildings with free pads and tampons for any resident who needed them. Nearly half—43 percent—of the people who took part in this pilot program had reported missing school or work because they didn't have access to menstrual products, a phenomenon called period poverty.

For most people who have a period, it's an inconvenience that comes once a month. But if you can't afford the pads and tampons that allow you to go to school or work, it's an entirely different story.

Nationally, a [poll](#) of 1,000 teens ages 13 to 19 found that 1 in 5 had trouble affording period products, and 4 in 5 missed class time or know a classmate who missed school because they couldn't get pads or tampons. Nearly 61 percent reported wearing a product for longer than recommended because they didn't have access to enough.

"Twenty-five percent of women are in period poverty, and it doesn't need to be that way," Dallas City Councilwoman Paula Blackmon said in January. She advocated for the project early on with her youth commissioner, Arran Davis.

The PAD program used \$200,000 from the federal American Rescue Plan Act for its seed funding, supplementing that with local donations that included a large fundraising effort by the Junior League of Dallas. The idea was to provide free feminine hygiene products at recreation centers, community centers, libraries, and WIC clinics in specific, high-poverty neighborhoods. As of October, the program had provided more than 2,500 packages of products at 24 locations. It will expand to 72 next month.

Last week, Office of Community Care Director Jessica Galleshaw and Senior Project Manager Victoria Moe updated the City Council's Workforce Equity and Education committee on what Dallas learned during the first



few months of the program. The demographic data it collected from participants will inform the program's future.

To obtain a month's supply of products, a Dallas resident can hand over a card completed with demographic information to a city staffer at any of the participating libraries or recreation centers. The cards can be filled out quickly, and Galleshaw said that staff at those locations were trained to accept the card and hand the discreetly-packaged bag over to the person requesting it, no questions asked.

The information on those cards taught the team a lot, including how much work and school Dallas residents were missing because of their periods. It also told them that the highest requests for products came from the 11 to 17 age group, and from two zip codes in West Dallas: 75211 and 75212.

Both Moe and Galleshaw said that they were surprised by how many participants had missed work or school because of their period.

"I was expecting it to come up," Galleshaw said. "I wasn't expecting it to be that high. The idea that people are having to miss specifically because they just don't have the products they need to be able to feel safe, secure, confident, and clean is sad. And I'm glad we had the forethought to ask that question."

With the framework in place, PAD will now expand to additional sites, which may eventually include Dallas ISD and Richardson ISD locations. Overall, the program has been well-received, and has attracted the attention of other cities that have begun to look at how to address the problem.

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"Jo Giudice, our library director, has mentioned that there's been a lot of conversations among fellow library folks," Galleshaw said. "She was really eager, and both Dallas Public Library and Park and Recreation have been great partners."

Several cities (including Fort Worth) offer free menstrual products in public restrooms. But Moe said it became clear early on that the city of Dallas would need to offer an entire month's worth of products in order for the pilot to be successful.

"We wanted to provide a sustainable option, even just providing pads and tampons in restrooms is really not sustainable for menstruating individuals who have a need for them," she said.

The city plans to expand the program to more sites as it searches for a sustainable way to continue funding it, considering those federal dollars won't last forever. Both said they also planned to advocate for state and federal policy changes that could make things easier, too.

Period equity advocates say a federal-level policy change could help low-income individuals have better access to menstrual products by allowing those purchases with Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program



(or SNAP) funds or WIC vouchers. In their presentation last week, Moe and Galleshaw said that the city would be promoting that change, too.

The other challenge is ending the sales tax placed on these items. Twenty-three states and Washington D.C. have ended sales taxes on menstrual products or never had one to begin with, according to Period Equity, an organization that advocates for what its name implies. Another 17 states have had similar bills die in legislative committees or on the floor. The organization told Pew Charitable Trusts that 27 states that tax period products get nearly \$120 million in revenue from those taxes each year.

In August, state Comptroller Glenn Hegar, state Sen. Joan Juffman, R-Houston, and Gov. Greg Abbott voiced support for exempting menstrual products from the state sales tax.

“Every woman knows that these products are not optional,” Huffman said. “They are essential to our health and well-being and should be tax exempt.” Hegar said that the state could “absorb this lost revenue easily.”

Councilwoman Blackmon advocated for the removal of the tax in the last legislative session, which failed. She said she’ll be advocating to have it removed in the upcoming session, too.

“I think every year at the state legislature there’s this push to remove taxes from these products because it’s basically a gender tax,” Blackmon said in January. “This is something that is a natural part of life, and we’re being taxed on it.”

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