

# MENG INTRODUCES BOLD PLAN TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO MENSTRUAL PRODUCTS

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Press Release

***Congresswoman's legislation would help combat period poverty and assist women and girls with obtaining needed products; measure introduced as the U.S. marks Menstrual Hygiene Day***

WASHINGTON, D.C. – To help commemorate *Menstrual Hygiene Day today*, U.S. Rep. Grace Meng (D-NY) introduced the Menstrual Equity for All Act of 2021, a bold, whole-of-government, and comprehensive initiative that seeks to help different populations of women and girls afford and access needed menstrual products, including tampons, pads and many other items.

“Period products are necessary and essential items for anyone who menstruates, and access to these items are a health care and human right,” **said Meng**. “But too many still struggle to obtain them, and it’s shameful and unacceptable that they remain out of reach for over half the population. This is especially true during the current COVID-19 crisis which has led to severe economic impacts affecting millions of families throughout the nation. Period poverty is debilitating and demeaning, and it is inextricably linked to a swath of issues – from economic justice to education; from housing to health care. No student should have to choose between their education and or their dignity. No family should have to choose between buying groceries or tampons. Although we have made progress in combatting period poverty, much more work needs to be done so that nobody ever faces challenges with affording and accessing these vital products. I am proud to continue championing this issue in Congress, and I will not stop fighting until we achieve full menstrual equity for women and girls everywhere.”

Meng’s legislation aims to remedy the problem in a multifaceted approach. The bill contains numerous components that include:

- Giving states the option to use federal grant funds to provide **students** with free menstrual products in schools – these grants already provide funding for health and wellness efforts;
- Incentivizing **colleges and universities** to implement pilot programs that provide free menstrual products to students;
- Ensuring that **incarcerated individuals and detainees** in federal (including immigration detention centers), state, and local facilities have access to free menstrual products, including requiring guidance on distribution;
- Allowing **homeless assistance providers** to use grant funds that cover shelter necessities (such as blankets and toothbrushes) to also use that money to purchase menstrual products;
- Requiring **Medicaid** to cover the cost of menstrual products;
- Directing large employers (with 100 or more employees) to provide free menstrual products for their employees **in the workplace**; and

- Requiring **all public federal buildings**, including buildings in the U.S. Capitol complex, to provide free menstrual products in restrooms.

A 2019 study found that among low-income women in a major U.S. city, nearly half had to choose between buying food and spending money on menstrual products. One in five teens have struggled to afford period products or were not able to purchase them at all, and as a consequence, over 80 percent say they missed school or know someone else who has. And a recent **study** revealed that 1 in 10 college students were unable to afford menstrual products in the past year during the coronavirus pandemic, and that those who experienced period poverty on a monthly basis, were more likely to experience moderate to severe depression.

“All people who menstruate require period products in order to fully participate in daily life. It's that simple,” **said Joanne Goldblum, CEO of the Alliance for Period Supplies and author of Broke in America: Seeing, Understanding and Ending U.S. Poverty.** “The Menstrual Equity for All Act recognizes that period poverty is a public health issue, and that equitable access to period supplies would ensure that millions of people can work, learn, and participate in our society knowing they have the material basic necessities to thrive. This critically needed legislation is long overdue.”

“PERIOD. is thrilled to support the Menstrual Equity for All Act of 2021,” **said Michela Bedard, Executive Director of PERIOD.** “This bill directly addresses the crisis of period poverty in the United States, which is a matter of human rights, economic justice and gender justice. The recent **State of The Period 2021 study** shows that nearly 1 in 4 teens in the United States struggle to access period products. People who menstruate require period products to be able to fully engage in work and school. Let’s make period products as accessible as toilet paper. Period.”

“Menstruation should be a subject that is spoken about openly and intentionally to help educate and empower young people,” **said Tessie San Martin, President and CEO of Plan.** “In Plan’s #ItsNormalPeriod campaign, we have seen that taboos around periods compromise a young person’s confidence during puberty and that’s why Plan is pleased to endorse this important legislation.”

“It’s long past time for society to recognize that menstrual hygiene is vital to the health and wellbeing of women and girls,” **said Stephanie J. Hull, President and CEO of Girls Inc.** “One in five teens struggles to afford period products, which affects their right to be healthy and to go to school with dignity. The Menstrual Equity for All Act would improve access to menstrual products, including in schools, which is critical to girls’ success. We applaud Congresswoman Meng for her leadership on this important issue.”

“The biological fact of menstruation shouldn’t be a barrier to gender equality or stymie women’s and girls’ realization of their human rights,” **said Amanda Klasing, interim Women’s Rights Co-Director at Human Rights Watch.** “Yet, in schools, universities, workplaces, and detention facilities, people living in poverty or in conditions of homelessness may struggle to manage their periods with dignity, with a devastating impact on basic rights. The Menstrual Equity for All Act is an important step to ensure that people with periods don’t miss out on their rights because they can’t access the means to manage menstruation.”

“Period poverty cuts across myriad inequities—gender and race; access to health care, housing, and education; and embedded in our criminal justice and immigration system,” **said Jennifer**

**Weiss-Wolf, Vice President for Development and Women and Democracy Fellow at the Brennan Center for Justice and the Co-Founder of Period Equity.** “As our nation builds back from the myriad crises wrought by the pandemic, we must be deliberate about including menstruation in the equation. The Menstrual Equity for All Act is paramount to achieving a just and fair society – for us all.”

“Menstrual equity is key to gender equity and reproductive health.,” **said Emily Martin, Vice President for Education and Workplace Justice at the National Women's Law Center.** “The Menstrual Equity for All Act recognizes that menstruation is neither shameful nor rare. It would help ensure that having a period is no longer a source of economic vulnerability.”

“All young people deserve to go through adolescence and puberty with dignity, support, and celebration instead of shame and stigma,” **said Christine Soyong Harley, President and CEO of SIECUS: Sex Ed for Social Change.** “The Menstrual Equity for All Act addresses and removes barriers for people who menstruate and allows them to freely navigate school and daily life with dignity. SIECUS: Sex Ed for Social Change is proud to support this Act in honor of Menstrual Hygiene Day and applauds Rep. Grace Meng for her clarion leadership on this often-invisible issue of menstrual equity.”

“When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, it resulted in sudden loss of income, employment, and housing for millions of Americans,” **said Dana Marlowe, Executive Director of I Support the Girls.** “Menstrual product requests to I Support the Girls (ISTG) shot up 35% as these essential items were both an added expense, and inaccessible due to hoarding. One year later, ISTG continues to receive high levels of requests as the economic impacts of the pandemic continue to ripple through our country. Free, accessible menstrual products eliminate one recurring expense for a family, allowing them to focus on other basic needs. ISTG and similar organizations cannot continue to be successful without the relationships created with warriors such as Grace Meng. With the reintroduction of the Menstrual Equity for All Act, we are putting the needs of menstruators into the public eye and highlighting those who will truly benefit from the passing of this Act.”

A copy of Meng’s Menstrual Equity for All Act, which has 84 cosponsors, can be viewed [here](#).

The measure is endorsed by dozens of organizations including: Girls Inc., National Women’s Law Center, Human Rights Watch, Together for Girls, Alliance for Period Supplies, PERIOD., American Association of University Women, MomsRising, Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS), Plan International USA, the Red SEA Collective, Center for Baby and Adult Hygiene (BAHP), I Support the Girls, Young Invincibles, Always®, Procter & Gamble, *U by Kotex®*, Greater DC Diaper Bank, Period Equity, Red Equity, ChildFund International, Food Bank for New York City, Georgia Stop Tax on Menstrual Products (STOMP), St. Louis Area Diaper Bank, Basic Necessities, Oluna, Texas Menstrual Equity Coalition, Period Toledo, Deloitte India, Transpire Oklahoma, Period Jalandhar, Flo Code, Girl Up Houston, Deeds Not Words, Fremont Youth and Community Outreach Inc, California National Organization for Women, National Organization for Women – Nevada Chapter, Maryland National Organization for Women, Endometriosis Foundation of Houston, Period Power Pantry, Global Girls Initiative, Mama Aicha Mujer Montuna, TeenTok, Helping Mamas, Princess, Pearls, & Puberty Inc., Girls Help Girls, Atlanta Growing Leadership of Women (GLOW), Jewish Federation of Greater Portland, the White Dress Project, Femi Secrets LLC, Alliance for Girl, Idaho Diaper Bank, Arkansas Period Policy Project, FemTruth Youth, Edgewell Personal Care, Free the Period, Pandia Health, Proof (Los Angeles), University Emergency Medicine Student Association (Tampa), Communities in Schools of Georgia, Restore to Empower Charity,

Midwest Access Coalitions, International Paper, Women's Empowerment Club, Lindsay M. Benton Foundation, Fremont Youth and Community Outreach Inc., The Life House (NE), Share Fund (NH), Street Medicine Kalamazoo, Bridge Beyond, Destiny Praise Outreach, Cause PDX, Hearts of Compassion Ministry, CAHS Comfort Closet, Seasons of Hope Inc., and Raising Girls Organization.

The reintroduction of Meng's bill follows her successful effort to enact legislation that allows menstrual products to be purchased with money from health savings accounts (HSA) and flexible spending accounts (FSA). The legislation, which she had long sponsored in Congress, was included in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act, which was the COVID-19 relief package that was passed by Congress and signed into law in March 2020. It permits funds to be used for numerous types of menstrual products such as tampons, pads, liners, cups, and other items.

Meng has also spearheaded other recent efforts to improve women's access to menstrual products. In March, when the nation commemorated Women's History Month and International Women's Day, Meng led a **letter** to President Biden urging him to take executive action to help end period poverty, and develop a national strategy for menstrual equity. Also in March, on the 60th Anniversary of the Peace Corps, Meng **reintroduced** the Menstrual Equity in the Peace Corps Act to address the lack of access and affordability of menstrual products for Peace Corps volunteers serving abroad. She also **sponsored** a resolution to raise awareness of period poverty, pushed for free menstrual products in restrooms at all veterans facilities, and **introduced** the Good Samaritan Menstrual Products Act which would allow for more menstrual products to be donated to and distributed by nonprofit organizations, among many other initiatives.