



## Proposed Ohio bill would require prisons to provide menstrual products

By London Bishop



Women across Ohio will converge in Columbus today to lobby for female inmates in federal, state and local lockup to have adequate access to menstrual hygiene products.

Ohio law is vague on how feminine hygiene products are handled in correctional facilities, which proponents of the proposed legislation said has led to everything from tampon shortages in prisons, fights among inmates to women denied hygiene products as punishment.

Women described inconsistencies with receiving pads and tampons at the federal, state and local level, with reasons ranging from lack of policy to outright discrimination.

“Women have come forth and talked about how they’ve experienced coercion, abuse, all types of things to just get the products to manage their cycle,” said Kayelin Tiggs, chair of Women of the NAACP. “For example, if a (corrections officer) isn’t getting along with a woman that day, he has the power to deny a woman her products.”

Across the nation, women have fought for period equity to treat feminine hygiene products as basic necessities. In Ohio, the so-called “pink tax” was repealed in 2020, which meant that women in the state no longer had to pay sales tax for menstrual products.

Now others are turning their attention to period equity in correctional facilities.

House Bill 743 – introduced Nov. 1 by Democratic state Reps. Latyna Humphrey of Columbus and Shayla Davis from the Cleveland suburb of Garfield Heights – would require correctional facilities to provide an adequate supply of feminine hygiene products in a range of sizes, as well as methods for proper disposal.



Little research exists on how the penal system affects the female body, Tiggs said, yet in Ohio prisons each female inmate is given a minimum of two packs of menstrual pads a month, regardless of age or individual hygiene needs.

“Women who don’t have cycles will accumulate the pads and then you have to buy off of (them,)” said Latisha Lashay, who served time in the Dayton Correctional Institution in 2018.

Name brand tampons and pads are sold in the prison commissary. But the cost is often beyond an inmate’s ability to pay. Lashay said while she was in prison, she earned \$15 a month, but pads or tampons cost between \$6 and \$7.

“I had to decide, do I want to brush my teeth, wash my clothes, or have something to take care of myself?” she said.

Members of the NAACP Dayton chapter said they support the proposed legislation and hope the bill will lead to further research on how incarceration affects the female body and further solutions for how women in prison can manage their cycles in a healthy and dignified way.

“We’re going to conduct the research on this using the experiences of women as a very important variable in this, because their voices are often left out,” Tiggs said. “We have to understand where that gap is and how to close that.”

The proposed bill also would prohibit discrimination by corrections staff, such as denying products or the use of showers during menstruation, even when inmates are separated for disciplinary reasons.

“You’re a person regardless of what happens to you, regardless of what you’ve done,” Lashay said. “You’re still a person and no human should be denied the right to be treated like a human being

<https://www.springfieldnewssun.com/local/proposed-ohio-bill-would-require-prisons-to-provide-menstrual-products/IDLDMIDSSJEX70DZGKYWU4Z7RU/>