

Period poverty bill to make sanitary products free in Scotland passes first Holyrood hurdle

Labour MSP Monica Lennon's plan to tackle 'period poverty' was backed after a U-turn by the SNP.

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Labour MSP Monica Lennon joins campaigners and activists during a rally outside the Scottish Parliament (Image: Jeff J Mitchell/Getty Images)



A world-leading campaign for free sanitary products in **Scotland** has passed its first major hurdle at Holyrood.

MSPs from all parties backed proposals to tackle **"period poverty"**, but there are concerns about the cost.

Labour's Monica Lennon, who drafted the plan, hailed the vote as a landmark moment as it passed by 112 votes to zero, with one abstention.

She said: "This is an amazing victory for everyone who has campaigned for free universal access to period products and who has convinced the Scottish Government to back this ground-breaking Bill.

"Scotland has already taken important steps towards improving access to period products and tackling stigma but legislation will guarantee rights, ensure that current initiatives continue in future on a universal basis, and will help us achieve period dignity for all."

The proposals will now be scrutinized by a committee of MSPs before parliament makes a final decision.

Campaigners and activists rally in support of a law to tackle "period poverty" (Image: Jeff J Mitchell/Getty Images)

If it passes the final stage, the legislation will ensure free universal access to period products to anyone who needs them, and put a duty on schools, colleges and universities to make free period products available in toilets.

Campaigners gathered outside parliament in a show of support as MSPs began to debate the principles of the plan.

The stage-one vote follows a U-turn from the Scottish Government, which announced last week it would back the general aim of the Period Products Bill.

The SNP had earlier been ridiculed for suggesting the plan might lead to cross-border tampon raids.



Communities Secretary Aileen Campbell said ministers still had concerns and would be *working with Lennon to produce more "robust" figures about the costs.*

The Labour MSP originally estimated the Bill would cost £9.7million a year.

The Scottish Government estimated the annual bill would be substantially higher at £24million.

The SNP have already invested millions of pounds to make free products available, but not on a universal basis.

Campbell said: "No one in government disagrees with the need to ensure period dignity exists in our country.

"That is why the Scottish Government is delivering this right now and why we have agreed to build on this work today by supporting the principles of the Bill at stage one."

SNP MSP James Dornan abstained in the vote, making him the only politician refusing to support Lennon's plan.