



# The US movement to make period products free is growing

By: Shirin Ali

More and more schools, states and localities across the country are moving to make period products free in an effort to end period poverty and the stigma it carries.

Scotland caught global attention on Monday after legislators there passed a new law making all period products free — the first country in the world to do so.

It was done in part to address period poverty, an issue that's defined as a lack of access to menstrual products, hygiene facilities, waste management and education. It affects women around the world, including in the U.S., and can cause physical, mental and emotional challenges.

“Proud of what we have achieved in Scotland. We are the first, but we won't be the last,” said Monica Lennon, the lawmaker responsible for the new law.

U.S. advocates praised Scotland's new law, with Period, an Oregon-based nonprofit working to end period poverty, saying, “Scotland's long fought for victory reminds us all that we can, and we will eradicate period poverty in our lifetimes,” on Twitter.

There's been a growing movement to make period products free in the U.S., with Rep. Grace Meng (D-N.Y.) introducing the Menstrual Equity for All Act of 2021, which would distribute federal grant funds to states in order to help fund free menstrual products in schools, prisons and homeless shelters.

Though the legislation has yet to be picked up by Congress, some states have moved forward with their own legislation. Hawaii has enacted a law that requires public schools to offer free period products to all students.

The Alliance for Period Supplies, a nonprofit working to end period poverty, found there are 17 states and Washington, D.C. that currently have laws in place that make period products free for students while in school — including California, Oregon, Washington state, Illinois, Colorado and more.

There are also a handful of states that give schools funding in order to provide free period products to students, but do not mandate they offer it. That includes Georgia, Missouri and North Carolina.

Not having access to period products can be debilitating for many, as data from nonprofit Free the Tampon Foundation found 86 percent of people started their period unexpectedly in public without the supplies they needed.





If and when a women were caught in public without period supplies they needed, 57 percent said they would feel embarrassed, 50 percent said they would feel annoyed and 43 percent would feel anxious and stressed

But even more serious, are the 16.9 million people who menstruate in the U.S. and who are also living in poverty. The Journal of Global Health Reports found that about two-thirds of those people are low-income women who could not afford to buy menstrual products in the past year — having to choose between food and menstrual products.

Adding to that burden are taxes, as menstrual pads and tampons are not exempt from federal sales tax, despite advocates noting that Viagra, medication that treats erectile dysfunction, and Rogaine, hair regrowth treatment, are exempt.

Instead, 13 states have moved to remove their sales tax on menstrual pads and tampons, but researchers have noted that does not always help lower-income individuals.

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