

**Montgomery County Council Bill 42-23,
Health and Sanitation – Menstrual Products in Public Restrooms
NCNW-PVS Social Justice Committee – December 12, 2023
SUPPORT**

Good morning, my name is Marilyn Massey-Ball, President of the Potomac Valley Section of the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW). Thank you for the opportunity to testify in favor of Montgomery County Council Bill 42-23. NCNW is one of the largest and most active national women's organizations in the country whose mission is to "lead, empower, and advocate for women of African descent, their families and communities". Our members are strong community advocates and include many elected officials on local, state and federal levels.

Bill 42-23 will not only address the concern of menstrual equity and health, but also concerns of physical and mental health. The need for menstrual products is a necessity, not a luxury; however, it is not treated as such and this, unfortunately, leads to limited to minimal resources for education and affordability. A 2023 study found that 16.9 million people who menstruate live in poverty and 2/3 of them stated that they struggled to afford menstrual products. In Maryland, 1 in 9 women & girls between the ages of 12 & 44 lives below the Federal Poverty Line. Current government assistance programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) cannot be utilized to purchase menstrual products. Bill 42-23 specifically addresses this gap and will provide much-needed relief; particularly to Montgomery County's low-income, at-risk residents in our Black communities.

Rising costs of menstrual products and the lack of menstrual and educational resources and accessibility can also lead to physical health issues due to the use of old cloths/rags, toilet tissue/paper towels, newspapers, as well as using menstrual products longer than recommended. These alternatives effectively cause poor hygiene, bacterial infections, reproductive health risks and the increased risk of potentially severe and/or fatal complications such as toxic shock syndrome.

In low-income communities, the compounding of multiple menstrual health challenges (i.e. lack of hygiene facilities, menstrual products, waste management and education) can ultimately result in generational cycles, within multigenerational households. These are key factors in menstrual inequity which disproportionately affect Black communities.

Given all that we are experiencing around the world today, access to menstrual products should not be the cause of increased mental health risks for Montgomery County residents. Young adult, college-age and adult women should not have to choose between purchasing food or purchasing feminine products. The inability to meet financial and menstrual health needs affects mental health. Providing free access to menstrual products will assist in addressing menstrual, physical and mental health challenges.

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According to the World Bank, as many as 500 million people across the globe lack access to basic menstrual products and hygienic bathroom facilities for use during their menstrual cycles. This is a global issue and NCNW-PVS thanks Councilmember William Jawando for championing legislation to combat period poverty for residents of Montgomery County, MD.

We ask for your support for passage of Bill 42-23 and strongly urge a favorable Committee report.

Respectfully,

Marilyn M. Massey-Ball

Marilyn M. Massey-Ball, MPH
NCNW-Potomac Valley Section, President



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF NEGRO WOMEN, INC.
POTOMAC VALLEY SECTION