



OUR MISSION:

Working to enhance the economic prosperity of greater Silver Spring through robust promotion of our member businesses and unrelenting advocacy on their behalf.

December 11, 2023

The Honorable Andrew Friedson
and Members of the Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Avenue, Sixth Floor
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Dear Council President Friedson and Members of the Council:

On behalf of the Greater Silver Spring Chamber of Commerce, representing more than 300 employers, mostly small businesses and non-profit organizations in greater Silver Spring and surrounding areas in Montgomery County, we recommend against supporting Bill 42-23, Menstrual Products Access and Equity Act as currently drafted. While we commend the good intentions of the bill, the GSSCC asks that the Council oppose this bill and consider other proposals that would have a positive impact on period poverty.

If the Council considers legislative action, we would be supportive of an amendment to Bill 42-23 that requires only County-owned buildings, including but not limited to libraries, recreation centers, and regional service centers, to provide menstrual products in its bathrooms. This effort could be combined with an educational campaign that encourages members of the community to, if they have not done so already, provide free menstrual products voluntarily. Similarly, the County itself could be the supplier to the businesses, requiring the businesses to only provide the dispenser. This may also help address certain supply issues that will arise and allows the County to guarantee that the intention behind the bill is met.

We contend, however, that this bill is not necessary. The State of Maryland already requires that all middle and high schools provide menstrual products in their restrooms. Furthermore, Maryland reduces the costs of menstrual products by exempting those items from the State sales and use tax. It is also our understanding that a significant number of businesses and non-profits already provide menstrual products at their own expense or through partnerships that allow them to do it affordably.

The GSSCC is also concerned about the bill's unknown expense to businesses. It is not difficult to imagine a scenario where free menstrual products in a business are taken on a consistent basis instead of as needed. In that scenario, small businesses in particular face high costs to keep menstrual products available, and the specter of a significant fine as mandated by Bill 42-23.

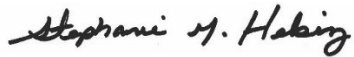
Bill 42-23, in our estimation, brings with it unintended consequences for the County's economy. County businesses are already facing a growing list of requirements they must adhere to via new laws and regulations. This proposal, which contains confusing language as to what restrooms even fall under this mandate, further complicates the environment that faces Montgomery County businesses. Ultimately, additional mandates on businesses harm the County's competitiveness and add yet another requirement that does not exist statewide or in virtually every other nearby jurisdiction.

Lastly, the GSSCC wants to caution the Council that if there is movement forward on this bill, we see the potential for a slippery slope of other health-related products to be deemed a "public need." Is the Council's expectation that the business community become suppliers/providers of various products, on top of the services they are already providing, and at their own expense? One again and to the point above, The Greater Silver Spring Chamber of Commerce would like to urge the Council to consider the message that this sends about doing business in Montgomery County.

We appreciate the opportunity to weigh in on Bill 42-23 and ask that the Council consider other options to address issues regarding period poverty. In conclusion, both the County and many private entities have made enormous investments in Montgomery County. We believe that the position presented in this letter will serve to protect those investments and help to assure a safe, secure, and vibrant future for Silver Spring and Montgomery County as a whole.

Should you have questions, don't hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephanie M. Helsing". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Stephanie Helsing
President & CEO
Greater Silver Spring Chamber of Commerce