

**Testimony for House Bill 61**

**Ohio House of Representatives Ways and Means Committee**

**Tuesday, October 10, 2017**

Chairman Schaffer, Vice Chairman Scherer, Ranking Member Rogers, and members of the House Ways and Means Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 61, which will exempt from sales and use tax the sale of tampons and other hygiene products related to menstruation.

My name is Elizabeth Brown. I am a member of Columbus City Council. This legislation addresses a topic that most women and girls have learned to keep private, but often at a cost. As a woman, a mother of a daughter, and a policymaker myself, I have come to understand that the way we acknowledge and accommodate menstruation needs to change. Like going to the bathroom, menstruation is a normal and healthy bodily function for women. It is not optional. And it should not be unspeakable. But this is the message that restrooms as well as the price of goods tell us every day. Over the past year, I've been working with my colleagues on Columbus City Council to create honest dialogue around menstruation and deliver meaningful change in the way that women access the menstrual products they need. Now, the city has begun providing free and accessible tampons and pads in our recreation centers, and we have ensured that all homeless shelters in Columbus would do the same. This is just the start.

Through my work on these initiatives, I've come to learn more about the many women in Columbus and across Ohio who find themselves choosing between menstrual products and food. In fact, a recently released Ohio United Way report on the working poor found that two of every five households – that's 1.8 million Ohio households – have difficulty covering a survival budget of housing, child care, food, transportation and health care. So, while the tax paid on these products is not so much money to you or me, for many women, the dollars and cents matter. For them, the tax exemption proposed by House Bill 61 can make the difference between affording their menstrual products or not. Yet any woman knows that going without these products is no option at all.

The prospect of not being able to purchase menstrual products isn't something that many women consider. However, for those who do go without, the negative impact on their lives is real. It means using alternate means like toilet paper or other makeshift solutions that are not sanitary



**ZACH M. KLEIN, PRESIDENT | PRISCILLA R. TYSON, PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE  
ELIZABETH C. BROWN | SHANNON G. HARDIN | JAIZA N. PAGE | MICHAEL STINZIANO**

**CITY CLERK | ANDREA BLEVINS, CMC**

and often are not safe. In turn, this sets up those same women who struggle to afford menstrual products to have a health situation that they can afford even less. For young girls who are already grappling with puberty-related changes in their bodies, facing menstruation without needed products creates anxiety and distraction, including at school. In fact, one case study of an initiative in New York City Schools demonstrated that girls are less likely to show up to school at all if they don't have the products they need. After New York City began providing free and accessible tampons and pads in middle and high schools, they observed a two-percent increase in attendance. That's a two-percent greater number of girls in our classrooms – learning, participating, preparing for their futures and our economy – every day.

Whether it's school-aged girls or women who are struggling to provide for themselves and their families, House Bill 61 will have a positive impact on Ohioans' lives. It's a simple way to inject more economic capacity into the pocketbooks of women – the half of the population that typically is responsible for household spending decisions and increasingly is the sole or primary breadwinner in American families.

I am committed to doing everything in my power at the municipal level to continue improving access to menstrual products in my city. Chairman Schaffer, Vice Chairman Scherer, Ranking Member Rogers, and members of the House Ways and Means Committee, I respectfully request your partnership and urge your support for House Bill 61.



**ZACH M. KLEIN, PRESIDENT | PRISCILLA R. TYSON, PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE  
ELIZABETH C. BROWN | SHANNON G. HARDIN | JAIZA N. PAGE | MICHAEL STINZIANO**

**CITY CLERK | ANDREA BLEVINS, CMC**