



**PROPONENT TESTIMONY OF:**

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PERIOD at The Ohio State University

**IN SUPPORT OF:**

HB 19 – Sales Tax  
*Exempt feminine hygiene products from sales tax*  
House Ways and Means Committee

Chairman Schaffer, Vice Chairman Lipps, Ranking Member Rogers and Members of the House Ways and Means Committee thank you for the opportunity to provide a proponent testimony on House Bill 19.

PERIOD at The Ohio State University is one of the leading chapters of the largest youth-run women's nonprofit in the world. Through service, advocacy and education we strive to serve menstruators in need and destigmatize periods. My name is Anusha and I am the president of PERIOD at The Ohio State University, an organization with over 180 members.

For me, the stigma surrounding menstruation manifested when I was in the fifth grade and the boys and the girls in my class were lead into separate classrooms, and while the boys learned about hand hygiene, the girls were introduced to the concept of periods. On our way out of the classroom the teachers instructed us to hide the pads in our bags as if periods were something to be ashamed of. As I grew older, I learned about the various ways the stigma surrounding menstruation manifested in society, culture and politics. Fast forward to six months ago, I co-founded this organization with two of my male non-menstruating friends after we decided to collectively research the Pink Tax in Ohio. One evening, we sat down together and google searched this Pink Tax in Ohio, read the bill along with all of the proponent testimonies and decided to take action on this issue. As a born and raised Buckeye, I would love for our state to join the fifteen other states which have already exempted the Pink tax.

A day after our first PERIOD meeting, we contacted the office of Representative Brigid Kelly (co-sponsor of HB61 at the time) and next thing you know, we had scheduled a meeting with her to discuss how we as students could help her with this issue. Shortly after, on October 1st we launched a National Petition in Conjunction with our National Non-profit, aiming to eliminate the Pink tax in Ohio! Through tabling around campus we spread immense awareness about this issue, garnering over 400 signatures within 3 hours and almost 1500 signatures till date! We educated students about the larger implications of this luxury tax placed on menstrual products as part of a larger fight for Gender Equality. For example we learned that majority of men's exclusively used items such as viagra, rogain, penile pumpers and suspensories amongst other items are classified as medical necessities and are therefore exempt from the nearly 6 percent sales tax, which combined with local taxes ranges from 6.50-8% in counties in Ohio.

However, menstrual hygiene products which are used much more widely and consistently by over half of the population every single month for an average of 40 years are classified as luxury items and are not exempt from this gender-biased tax. This further raises the question, why tax something that we have no choice to buy? Because after all, menstrual hygiene is a right and not a privilege.

My Chapter at The Ohio State University investigated the wider implications that barriers to access to menstrual hygiene pose in society. For instance, I was shocked to learn of a story my Volunteer Coordinator at the Hospital informed me about, regarding a young volunteer who didn't have access to menstrual hygiene products at the hospital (no place to buy them or get them for free from restrooms). As a result she ended up bleeding through the sofa in the volunteer office, which was not only a biohazard in the hospital, but a cause of embarrassment, potentially impacting her self-esteem. This happens to thousands of young girls every day, and due to the highly stigmatized nature of the issue of period poverty, it is rarely talked about. We learned that making period products more expensive creates a substantial barrier to access, leaving many menstruators who cannot afford these necessary hygiene products more susceptible to Toxic Shock Syndrome, adding a financial strain to single mothers, the homeless and the LGBTQ community. We also learned that lack of access to menstrual hygiene products is the leading reason why girls drop out of school in developing countries and coupled with period-related pain is one of the leading reasons behind girls' school absences in the U.S. In fact, a study done by Always on period poverty, stated that in the U.S. an estimated 1 out of 5 girls are kept out of school during their menstrual cycle.

That's when we realized that in order for us to fight the Pink Tax in Ohio, we had to build student awareness and momentum for this issue. That's when we launched our second petition as part of our United For Access Campaign in collaboration with Thinx, aiming to get free menstrual hygiene products into all restrooms on the Ohio State University Campus. Together, we are demanding that all students at The Ohio State University have free and easy access to period products at school and on campus. Imagine if students were responsible for bringing their own toilet paper and soap to school. That would be unreasonable, but so is not providing basic necessities such as tampons and pads for students who menstruate.

To carry this conversation forward, a few months ago we organized a press conference at The Ohio State University aiming to bridge the efforts being made on a school, city and state level in Ohio as part of the Menstrual Movement. Our school has made a tremendous effort, and has stocked free menstrual hygiene products into the restrooms of over 150 out of 200 academic buildings, with the goal of covering all academic buildings by the end of this semester. In the future we also plan to partner with Councilwoman Elizabeth Brown to get free menstrual hygiene products into all Columbus City schools and start a dialogue about Menstrual Health in an effort to help close a pervasive gender gap in Ohio. Our goal is to use all of this student momentum to fight to eliminate the Pink Tax in Ohio, which would make it easier to purchase these products and donate to those in need.

On January 28th, a group of us from The Ohio State University traveled to Washington D.C. with activists from all over the country to raise awareness about the issue of period poverty through doing demonstrations in front of the White House geared towards Betsy Devos and the Department of Education. We also had the opportunity to speak to various News Outlets such as The Washington Post, shining a National spotlight on Ohio and putting us in a position to lead on this issue of the Pink Tax. Together, we handed over boxes containing more than 44,000 signatures to the Department of Education, asking Betsy Devos to sign the letter to support the fight to end period poverty.

Since then, not only has our university expanded their efforts of providing free menstrual products, expanding soon into residence halls as well, but we have started coaching other students around the country through policy workshops to encourage them to participate and voice in these issues.

On International Women's Day, I am proud to say that we launched and are leading a National Campaign, aiming to involve our U.S. Senators and Representatives to sign a letter addressed to the Department of Education. We hope to measure the magnitude of the need of providing free menstrual products in all school restrooms and so, we are asking the Department of Education to commission a study on the effects of period poverty in schools via a petition, which upon signing will be sent to all state representatives.

We believe this issue is much larger than finances, but one that touches on gender equality and human rights. Eliminating the pink tax will allow Ohio to lead the way to a more inclusive future, one that respects and accepts women and girls as equals. For those reasons, I stand here today asking you to sign this bill into place and support our cause.

I would be happy to answer any questions should you have them. You can contact me at [period.osu@gmail.com](mailto:period.osu@gmail.com) or reach me at my number, 614-815-5346.