

**Testimony for House Bill 19**

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

**Tuesday, March 12, 2019**

Chairman Schaffer, Vice Chair Lipps, Ranking Member Rogers, and member of the House Ways and Means Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 19, which will exempt the sale of tampons and other hygiene products related to menstruation from sales and use tax.

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. During my first term on City Council, I've worked with my colleagues to create honest dialogue around menstruation to deliver meaningful change in the way that women access the menstrual products they need. The city started providing free and accessible tampons and pads in our recreation centers, and we worked with homeless shelters in Columbus to ensure they did the same. This is just the start.

Through working 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 necessities like food. In fact, a report released by Ohio United Way found that two out 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 menstrual products is not a significant hit to the budget of some, for many women, the dollars and cents matter. For households living paycheck to paycheck and making tough decisions between the necessities they need that month, House Bill 19 can make the difference between being able to afford menstrual products or not. These are decisions being made every day in Ohio, but any woman knows that going without these products is no option at all.



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For those women who do go without menstrual products, the negative impact on their lives is real. It means using alternate options like toilet paper or other makeshift solutions that are not sanitary and often are not safe. In turn, this can cause those same women to have health complications that they can afford to deal with even less. For young girls who are already grappling with puberty-related changes in their bodies, facing menstruation without the proper products they need creates additional anxiety and distraction, especially at school. In fact, one case study in New York City found that girls are less likely to show up to school at all if they don't have the menstrual 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 number represents two-percent more girls in our classrooms – learning, participating, and preparing for their futures – every day.

Whether it's school-aged girls or women who are struggling to provide for themselves and their families, House Bill 19 will have a positive impact on Ohioans's lives. It's a simple way to inject more money into the pocketbooks of women – the half of the population that is typically responsible for household spending decisions and increasingly 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 Chair Lipps, Ranking Member Rogers, and member of this committee, I respectfully request your partnership and urge your support for House Bill 19



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