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Proponent Testimony for HB 61

Greetings, Chairman Schaffer, Ranking Member Rogers, and members of the Ohio House Ways & Means Committee. I'm Michelle Heritage, executive director of Community Shelter Board, the collective impact organization working to prevent and end homelessness every day in Columbus and Franklin County. I'm here today on behalf of women experiencing homelessness, women living at or below the poverty line, and women working two or three part-time jobs to make ends meet and care for their children.

A monthly menstrual cycle is a normal bodily function for women just as going to the bathroom is for men. Yet for women living in poverty, the cost of menstrual products competes with the costs of food and shelter.

Thanks to the incredible generosity of LOLA, a feminine care company, and the leadership of our partners in local government, 60,000 tampons were donated to Columbus homeless shelters this year. That means every woman walking through the doors of a homeless shelter in Columbus has access to free tampons. Helping women who are homeless take care of their most basic health and hygiene needs with tampons, soap, and toilet paper allows them to focus on obtaining a job, an apartment, and anything else that stands in the way of getting back on the road to self-sufficiency.

The average family served in our shelters is a 32-year old, single mother with two very young children. We served more than a thousand of these families last year. Where are all these moms now? They are back on the road to self-sufficiency, but that road is a tight rope. Mom is likely working two part-time jobs, juggling child care, and managing a meager budget on her own. Rents are rising at twice the pace of income in our community. Her income has to go further than ever before.

Removing the tax from tampons and pads would ease the financial burden on women who are already fighting for stability for their families.

I respectfully request the House Ways and Means Committee to favorably consider the passage of House Bill 61. Thank you for your time, and I am happy to answer any questions.



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