

Testimony in Support of House Bill 29

Submitted by Wendy Tarr, Executive Director ARCH (Accompanying Returning Citizens with Hope)
April 8, 2025

Chairman, Vice Chair, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong support of House Bill 29, which would ensure free and adequate access to feminine hygiene products, a variety of product sizes, access to daily showers, and appropriate receptacles in correctional facilities across Ohio for individuals who are menstruating.

ARCH (Accompanying Returning Citizens with Hope) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting individuals reentering society after incarceration. We provide housing, workforce development, and holistic wraparound services to people returning home from Ohio's prisons. We also spend a great deal of time inside the institutions, listening to those currently incarcerated and working to remove barriers to dignity, health, and opportunity.

We are saddened that this bill did not pass during the last General Assembly, despite little to no opposition. This is a basic issue of health, dignity, and equity. It is long overdue, and we urge the legislature to pass this bill now. Through our work, we have heard directly from dozens of women who have shared deeply personal and often painful accounts of how menstrual hygiene is managed—or mismanaged—behind bars. These stories have shown us the critical need for a bill like HB 29. They are not isolated stories—they reflect a broader systemic issue that demands a consistent, statewide solution.

Here's what we've learned:

- Not all facilities offer tampons or free menstrual products, and even when they do, access is not always reliable.
- The products provided often fail to meet basic needs—poor quality, limited sizes, and inadequate quantities force many women to ration or resort to unsafe alternatives of handmade tampons or overutilization of products that are poor quality - one quality pad is a better use of money than using 5 low-quality pads at one time.
- Commissary prices are inflated, and many women simply cannot afford to buy more products even if they are available for purchase. Women have reported hoarding or bartering for these essential items out of desperation. Yet, stocking up on products for fear of running out can be considered a violation, putting women at risk of disciplinary action.
- In many facilities, women must ask guards for additional supplies. This process is not only demeaning but sometimes leads to denial or delay of products.
- Showers are not always accessible when menstruating, compromising hygiene, comfort, and health as blood is transmitted via clothing to other spots of the prison.
- Receptacles with lids for menstrual product disposal are not always readily available, creating an unsanitary and distressing environment.

From a fiscal standpoint, HB 29 is also a smart investment.

Providing adequate products, access to daily showers, and appropriate receptacles isn't just a moral and public health obligation—it is a cost-saving measure that reduces the strain on correctional healthcare systems. When women are denied access to proper hygiene and adequate menstrual care, they come up with their own handmade solutions - such as handmade tampons from taking pads, rolling them, and inserting them in their bodies. The consequences often lead to preventable medical issues such as bacterial infections, and urinary tract infections (UTIs). Infections caused by improper menstrual management are not just painful—they are costly. A pack of quality menstrual products may cost a few dollars per month per person. Treating a single UTI can cost hundreds when factoring in medical staffing, diagnostics, medication, and follow-up. If an infection spreads or becomes chronic, costs rise even higher—along with the human toll.

While the women's prison has adopted an updated policy on this issue, every woman in prison came from a different county facility with its own set of rules—and unfortunately, many of those rules are inadequate. We need fairness and consistency across the state. Just as this legislature passed a law ensuring free menstrual products for students in schools, we must extend that same standard of care and dignity to adult women in state custody. HB 29 will help bring us closer to that goal.

ARCH urges you to move this bill forward without delay. No woman should be forced to choose between her health and her compliance with rules she didn't write and cannot control. We ask you to stand with the women behind the walls who do not have a voice in this room but live these realities every month. Their stories, their health, and their humanity matter.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Wendy Tarr, Executive Director
ARCH – Accompanying Returning Citizens with Hope

Here are just a few snippets, in their own words:

"You are provided only a few (pads) at a time. They are of horrible quality. They fall apart, leak, and don't fit right - no overnight protection. We didn't get tampons so we would make tampons out of pads, causing risk of UTIs or even coming undone while inside us." (R.A.)

We only got 2 (pads) at a time and it was usually a task to get a corrections officer (CO) to give them to you. It depended on what CO was working. They (hygiene products) needed to be changed more frequently than given. (R.K.)

There never was an adequate supply. We were given 1-2 maximum and we were required to ask repeatedly. The products were poor quality - the cotton would separate and fall apart. They were not absorbent. (M.D.)

Accidents occurred almost daily and inmates were denied new pants and panties. They had to walk around with blood on their pants for hours, sometimes days. I had to sneak and wash my own bedding. (B)