

Testimony in Support of House Bill 29
Submitted by Amber Ross (Written Only)
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Chairman, Vice Chair, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee,

Of all the things I never expected to have to do in my life, going to jail was one of them. But that's where I ended up. And amid all the change, the fear, the adjustment—I never expected that my health would be at risk simply because I was a woman on my period.

When I first arrived at the county jail, I was menstruating. During intake, I was told I had to remove my tampon before being scanned. I didn't think much of it at the time—I assumed I'd be given another one. But I wasn't.

Instead, I sat in a holding cell for six hours with absolutely nothing. No tampon, no pad, no supplies. I asked for sanitary products and was told, *"We'll get you some."* But they never came.

Eventually, when I was moved upstairs, I was able to shower and get somewhat clean. There were pads available, but you had to ask the guard for them directly. Imagine the discomfort—not just from menstruating in that environment—but from having to ask a male corrections officer for a pad.

Furthermore, they had taken my underwear and not provided me with new ones, so I didn't have a place to stick the pad. The only underwear one can keep is white, and I was not in luck with my choice of underwear going to jail. I had to place the pad directly on the scrubs, which were cut for a male body (the crotch is lower). This does not work for women on their period. To get underwear, I had to order them from the commissary and they came 4 days later. It also cost me \$11 for one pair of underwear from the commissary. To my surprise, I later learned men are provided boxers for free. I was livid hearing about this after I was released.

Imagine my surprise, after that first night of trying to adjust to everything else and this situation on my period, I realized I was allergic to the pads they provided. So now it wasn't just embarrassing—it was painful. I had to go to the health aide and explain, in front of others, that something was wrong with my body. Their answer? *"You can order tampons from the commissary."*

But I didn't know how long I'd be there. If I ordered anything, I might not even be around to receive it. And besides, I had no money to buy them.

By the second night, another woman told me she could make me a tampon out of a pad. I never used it, but I watched others do it—because they had no choice. Some women were allergic to the products. Others couldn't handle the texture or the fit. And when they told staff, the response was simple: *"Then bleed on yourself."*

That's what we were told. Just bleed on yourself.

Eventually, when I was transferred to ORW (Ohio Reformatory for Women), I was relieved to see they had both pads and tampons available. But even there, I found out quickly—I was still having an allergic reaction. I found myself in a situation where the quality of the product was such that I needed to still buy products and have them shipped in. The only reason that I was able to do that was because I had family, but there may be other people in that situation without any help. So, having quality tampons or other types of pads that are not the cheapest version is critical.

That's why I support House Bill 29.

No one should have to sit in a cell for hours, bleeding into their clothes. No one should be forced to beg for pads or be humiliated for needing help. No one should have to make homemade tampons out of desperation.

This bill requires all correctional facilities to provide adequate menstrual products, multiple sizes, daily access to showers, and proper receptacles—basic things that ensure dignity and hygiene. Not only is it the humane thing to do, it's also the fiscally responsible one. Preventing infections and medical issues through basic care is far cheaper than treating avoidable health complications.

Women in jails and prisons are still human. Still deserving of safety. Still deserving of dignity.

Please pass HB 29.

Thank you.