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**To: Government Oversight Committee**  
**Fr: Michaela Burriss, Policy Director**  
**Re: House Bill 29 Proponent Testimony**  
**Date: Tuesday, April 8, 2025**

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Good afternoon, Chair Hall, Vice Chair Ferguson, Ranking Member Humphrey, and members of the Government Oversight Committee. Thank you for allowing me to testify on behalf of the Ohio Justice & Policy Center in support of House Bill (HB) 29, legislation concerning feminine hygiene products and shower access for those who are incarcerated in municipal, county, and state correctional facilities.

The Ohio Justice & Policy Center is a nonprofit law firm with offices in Cincinnati and Columbus. Our mission is to promote fair, intelligent, and redemptive criminal justice systems. We fight for equal, compassionate justice and fair treatment of those who are incarcerated in all stages of their incarceration, because every person deserves dignity after their conviction and freedom after their sentence.

OJPC's policy reform agenda is transformative and rooted in our client-centered approach, including our flagship project: Human Rights in Prison. This guides our work in and with the Ohio legislature, advocating for the abolition of inhumane practices — from shackling pregnant prisoners to capital punishment. We believe HB 29 is necessary public policy because menstruation is a natural and involuntary biological function, and access to menstrual products is essential for maintaining hygiene, dignity, and equality.

Ohio has an incarceration rate of 621 per 100,000 people. A significant portion of that incarcerated population is female, with the number of women in Ohio's prisons increasing significantly, from 538 in 1978 to 4,426 in 2017, a 600% increase and growing at nearly double the rate of men. Drug possession and Trafficking in Drugs are the top two offenses.

Most people in Ohio prisons are eventually released and reenter society. At least 95% of state prisoners are released from prison at some point, with nearly 80% released to parole supervision. For this reason, especially, both for the impacted individuals and our communities as a whole, we must make incarceration as restorative as possible.



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The stated aim of Ohio's Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC) is to reduce recidivism and improve community safety, **focusing on rehabilitation through various programs and services** to help individuals become law-abiding members of society. This includes a safe, humane, and secure environment.

Poor menstrual hygiene can lead to physical health problems such as urinary tract infections, reproductive infertility and infections, and toxic shock syndrome, as well as mental health issues, like feelings of shame and embarrassment. Product access is essential to the health and well-being of this population and achieving our rehabilitative goals.

This is likely why both the federal government beginning in 2017, and 25 states, have implemented legislation requiring free access to menstrual products in prisons, aiming to improve the health and dignity of incarcerated women. While some initial concerns included hiding contraband, these didn't materialize.

In fact, issues with implementation have predominantly fallen on consistency and some prisons not fully implementing the policies. Additionally, the product brands used in these facilities are undisclosed, however, reports from varying states suggest that the feminine hygiene products that are provided for free are less absorbent than the industry standard products which were only available for purchase in the canteen, leading advocates to push for adequate supplies, quality products, and consistent implementation of policies. We'd ask ODRC to mind these considerations once HB 29 is passed.

It's impossible to provide a precise number of women in Ohio prisons who still menstruate, as that would require knowing the age range and health status of all incarcerated women. However, it's safe to assume that a significant portion of the female prison population, including those in Ohio's women's prisons, the Ohio Reformatory for Women (ORW), the Franklin Pre-Release Center, and the Northeast Pre-Release Center, are still menstruating. HB 29 can therefore improve the lives of thousands of Ohioans in state care, an acknowledgment consistent with the 2019 signing of Senate Bill 26, legislation initially introduced by Cincinnati's own, the late, great Brigid Kelly, eliminating Ohio sales taxes on feminine hygiene products, commonly known as the Pink Tax.

By passing HB 29 we are creating a more just and fair incarceration experience for Ohio's women, and by extension a more rehabilitative and safer Ohio. Chair Hall, Vice Chair Ferguson, Ranking Member Humphrey, and members of the Government Oversight Committee, thank you again for allowing me to present the Ohio Justice & Policy Center's strong support for HB 29. I would be glad to answer any questions.