Madam Chairwoman, Susan Manchester; Vice Chair, Andrew Brenner; Ranking member of the committee, Casey Weinstein; and all other members of the committee, my name is Heidi Arnold. I have been in higher education for 30 years and have researched many aspects of incarceration and re-entry. For the last 12 years, I have worked in the community to advocate for incarcerated women and to mentor them upon release. I am a volunteer at Dayton Correctional Institution and in the Montgomery County Jail. I am an active member of organizations supporting incarcerated men and women and second chance pathways. For the last three years, I have been working in the community to gather stories from formerly incarcerated women about their experience of being a menstruating female behind bars.

My academic research focuses on how formerly incarcerated people, especially women, could best be supported. One of the key factors is social support, having a network of people that a person can turn to in times of need. Because of this research, I compiled stories and the insight of 36 formerly incarcerated women into a book. Let me tell you what I have learned.

First, women enter jails and prisons with psychological wounds and incur more while incarcerated. Incurred trauma including fear and control over accessing feminine hygiene products adds to women's original trauma. Unsatisfactory living conditions, the possibility of abuse, intimidation and harassment along with restricted social support brings the outcomes to a negative number. Prisons are and were built on a male-specific model so the female body has been overlooked. The current facility in Dayton originally housed one man per cell and today houses two women in those cells.

Secondly, I've heard story after story of women bleeding for weeks without being able to leave their cells for more than a few minutes. Women demoralized because a man refuses to give her the supplies she needs. Women who believe they have no other choice than to trade sexual favors for feminine hygiene products. I have seen demonstrations of how toxic, makeshift tampons are created from toilet paper, flimsy pads, and clothing.

Thirdly, DCI is currently offering menstrual products in each housing unit; however, the historical restriction has caused inmates to hoard the products so that those in need may have none. Ohio women are forced to buy, beg and humiliate themselves for period products. A 2021 report from the Prison Policy Initiative said women in Ohio only qualify as indigent—qualifying for free shampoo, soap, and toothpaste—when they have less than $12 in their inmate account. State pay is less than $20 in Ohio and is reduced by each trip to the infirmary and money automatically withdrawn for fees.

And finally, being unable to manage her body with appropriate products can bring distress on a woman. Research shows a clear tie between shame and humiliation due to a lack of products which leads to reduced psychological health and even depression. These mental health issues are carried into our neighborhoods, workplaces, and organizations in addition to the mental strain of the re-entry process. The Global Menstrual Collective says women should have the ability to care for themselves during menstruation as well as have access to water, sanitation, and quality products that allow them to go to work and attend school. Some people believe the carceral system keeps sanitation just out of reach to lessen self-esteem and reinforce powerlessness. I want to believe better of Ohio.

I support House Bill 29 because all women deserve appropriate supplies needed during menstruation. I know these women. To you, they may be a number, a statistic on a chart or only a stereotype. But they are good neighbors, mothers, productive employees, and grandmothers. Women face so many dangerous and demeaning circumstances while incarcerated. Let's not let access to feminine hygiene supplies continue to be one of them. I ask that you support the bill and pass it onto the Senate.