

Madam Chairwoman Marilyn John; Vice Chair, Bill Dean; Ranking member of the committee Sean Brennan; and all other members of the committee, my name is Kayelin Tiggs. For years I have led behavioral neuroscience and psychological research projects for the U.S. Military. Therefore, House Bill 30 is an integration of multiple psychological methodologies that address the issue of access to menstrual products in Ohio prisons and jails.

It is a common misconception that people are sent to prison to be punished. However, the act of incapacitating someone and stripping them of their rights and freedom should be the only punishment. Every woman who you will hear from today has acknowledged the actions that led to their incarceration, and accepts the consequences. Therefore, the denial and withholding of menstrual products and forcing them to use unhygienic methods to prevent from soiling their clothing is cruel and inhumane.

I want to be clear that corrections facilities currently have menstrual products on site; however, the products are not distributed fairly, consistently, or in an adequate quantity. Currently, the administration of products lie within the discretion of guards and staff, which allows room for abuse, withholding, coercion, and maltreatment of women. Can you imagine having to use loose paper, dirty socks, cleaning rags, mattress padding, torn sheets, or makeshift pads to prevent accidents- all because you are denied an adequate number of products. This is the reality for thousands of women across the state. Or imagine being so desperate, now you are contemplating stealing, fighting, or providing sexual favors for products.

HB30 addresses the **INCONSISTENCIES** in the administration of menstrual products so women can manage their cycles safely, consistently and with dignity. Additionally, the goal is to implement legislation across the state so that no matter what facility a woman is transferred to, there will be standardized levels of access in place. Currently, over 23 states have passed laws to create greater access to menstrual products in correctional facilities and institutions.

Choosing between food and menstrual products, and withholding products as a form of punishment was a common theme throughout this research. Skipping meals to remain close to a toilet is a shared experience among many incarcerated women. They described embarrassment and humiliation when soiling their clothes and underwear, then being denied when asking for new garments. Therefore, the solution is to remain “safe” in a cell. Using the phrase “having an accident” when referring to an adult experience feels degrading, but this is exactly what is happening. Also, let’s not forget that we have children who are behind bars experiencing a menstrual cycle, and some that will start their cycle for the first time in an institution. When a person is incarcerated, they are reduced to what I like to call a child-like state where they are completely reliant on the facility for their most basic needs. For a woman, menstrual products are a basic need. Laundry day is once a week in most facilities. In some cases, showers are also limited. It may be days before a woman can wash her soiled clothing and bathe. Many more stories of women having to fight, steal, provide sexual favors, or create unsafe products outline the importance of addressing this issue at the legislative level. In November 2022, this advocacy led to the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections (ODRC) requiring that the state facilities provide products free of charge. However, this policy is not mandated into Ohio law, regularly followed by corrections staff, or applies to all level facilities like jails or workhouses. I have testimony from women currently behind bars to prove that this is not enough.

Additionally, there is no legislation in the state of Ohio that mandates these facilities to have a policy in place to govern how menstrual products are administered, stored, or disposed of. In any public restroom that you enter, there is a separate bin with a lid to dispose of menstrual products. However, this is not the case in our jails and prisons. Women have described having to carry used products in their bare hands from their cell to another part of the facility, because there are no disposal bins accessible to them by their cell. I worked with the Dayton City Commission and Montgomery County Jail in Dayton Ohio to have bins placed in their female units. It cost the facility a little over \$1000. It is possible and it is happening. There are clear benefits to ensuring access and consistency.

Women reported: developing monthly anxiety knowing that their menstrual cycle was approaching, feeling dirty, feelings of hopelessness, feelings of shame, and embarrassment over a natural biological function. The cultural shame of menstrual cycles and compounded stigma of incarceration unnecessarily exacerbate preexisting physical and mental health problems, creating a potentially unsafe environment for all involved. Consistent access to menstrual products is vital to ensuring sanitary living conditions and the healthy bodies of people who will likely return to society, including the staff.

Exposure to blood and other bodily fluids can put the entire facility at risk, as this issue is a public health issue. Many believe that they are safe from bloodborne pathogens if there is no blood visibly present or if it has dried. Bloodborne viruses, such as Hepatitis B and C can live for days on surfaces outside of the body. It is common to hear stories about pads slipping out of underwear and pants onto the floor because the quality is so poor that they do not stick to clothing properly. Passing this legislation is crucial for decreasing the risk of infection and spread of disease, especially when women must resort to using cloth, blankets, or rags that will be washed and mixed with others' clothing on laundry day. The FDA regulates tampons and pads as Class 2 Medical devices because these items are necessities, not luxuries. For these reasons and more, I ask that you pass HB30 and support it moving forward.

Thank you,

Kayelin Tiggs