



# New Senate leadership could spell support for mandating free menstrual products in public school



Jesse Scheckner, Florida Politics

The Senate now has a President who backed related legislation during her first term.

After years of hitting snags in Tallahassee, legislation that would require public schools to provide students with free menstrual products may now have a better shot at advancing, thanks to Senate President Kathleen Passidomo.

The measure ([SB 334](#)), which Senate Democratic Leader Lauren Book refiled this week, is called the “Learning with Dignity Act.” Its title is a reference to [legislation](#) Gov. Ron DeSantis signed in 2019 mandating that menstrual products be provided free to Florida’s female inmates.

Book’s bill and its House twin ([HB 389](#)), which Democratic Rep. Kelly Skidmore filed, would similarly mandate that public schools – including charter schools – must provide menstrual hygiene products at no charge to middle and high school students in each school nurse’s office and other health offices.

Unlike prior iterations of the legislation, including ones Book and former Democratic Rep. Michael Grieco carried last year, this year’s version would also require schools to stock tampons, sanitary pads and other related products in at least 25% of restrooms.

So school districts can do so responsibly and in a cost-efficient manner, the bill recommends partnerships with nonprofits, nongovernmental entities, businesses and “other organizations to assist in supplying and maintaining the required menstrual hygiene products.”



“Menstrual hygiene products are a health care necessity and are not items that can be (forgone) or substituted easily, (and access to them) is a serious and ongoing need in this state,” the bill says.

“When students do not have access to affordable menstrual hygiene products, they may miss multiple days of school every month ... whereas, when students have access (to them), they are able to continue with their daily lives with minimal interruption.”

Twenty-three percent of menstruating students struggle with access to period products, according to the State of the Period 2021, a according to study tracking period poverty across the U.S. that consulting firm SKDK conducted for reusable period underwear company **Thinx**. Lower-income students and students of color, particularly Latino students, are disproportionately impacted by a lack of access to menstrual products, the study found.

Almost 4 million children in Florida live near or below the poverty line, and more than 2 million qualify for free or reduced lunch, according to the nonprofit American Children’s Campaign.

Concerns over access to menstrual products is at the heart of the “period equity” movement, which in recent years has seen a majority of state legislatures receive bills pushing for better tampon and sanitary pad provisions.

That includes a bill U.S. Sen. Rick Scott signed in 2017 while serving as Governor. The measure, which Passidomo sponsored, made Florida the 14th state to repeal taxes on menstrual products. Senate staff analyses at the time estimated it would create a negative \$8.9 million impact yearly on the state budget and result in roughly \$2.3 million in lost annual revenue locally.

In turn, the tax cut was expected to provide \$11 million-per-year in savings to residents.

The bill – which came less than a year after a Florida woman sued the state over the tax, which she complained was discriminatory – was the third piece of legislation Passidomo filed after winning election to the Senate. She described her bill as “common sense legislation” and called menstrual hygiene goods “necessary products.”

The “Learning with Dignity Act” has yet to receive a single hearing in either chamber since Book first filed it in September 2019.

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