



DC Passes Bill to Require Access to Period Products in Public Buildings

by [Eli Kale](#)



D.C. Council unanimously passed a bill requiring all Washington, D.C. government-owned buildings to provide access to free period products.

The “Period Act,” introduced by Ward 2 Councilmember Brooke Pinto (LAW ’17) in March 2021, seeks to expand access to free period products for all District residents in public buildings such as libraries, recreation centers, shelters and congregate care facilities. The bill, officially titled the Period Equity Righting an Injustice of District Residents Act of 2022, follows another unanimously-passed bill introduced by Pinto in January that requires schools in the District to provide free period products to students. The Council held a public hearing on the bill Oct. 11 ahead of its ultimate passage Nov. 15.

With the passage of the bill, government-operated and government-owned buildings leased by private entities must provide free period products in all women’s and gender-neutral bathrooms, as well as in at least one men’s bathroom in buildings where no gender-neutral bathrooms are available. These products include both tampons and pads to ensure the needs of menstruating individuals are met.

According to Pinto, the bill seeks to ensure the health and dignity of D.C. residents and ensure access to period products without worrying about costs or where to find them.

“Women, transgender men and nonbinary people who menstruate need access to free menstrual products – a health necessity each month,” Pinto said in a press release. “We have seen the associated costs and burdens of accessing these products fall disproportionately on people of color and lower income families.”

While a lack of specific research exists on how many D.C. residents are affected by an inability to access period products, experts have found that a lack of access to period products is correlated with food insecurity, suggesting that roughly 10.6% of District residents experience difficulty accessing period products.

The bill will help improve the health and wellbeing of low-income menstruating individuals, according to Pinto.



“Period poverty focuses a lot on the economic barriers that prevent people from accessing period products,” Ping said. “The fact that these products are being made available in public restrooms will allow people who are houseless or people who can’t afford to get to these products to not have to decide between period products and food on their table to support their family.”

According to research conducted by the D.C. Council Office of Racial Equity (CORE), a lack of access to free period products can affect the mental and physical health, as well as the social and economic well-being, of menstruating people. This lack of access has a disproportionate effect on women of color and women of color with low incomes.

Ping said it is essential that the bill focused on how access to period products impacts underserved communities throughout D.C.

“It’s really important, not just for period poverty but for every single bill, to really examine how this bill impacts marginalized communities and keep working to ensure that we’re improving our laws and policies to better encapsulate the needs of all people.” Ping said.

The bill will cost \$2.3 million to implement for the 2023 fiscal year and a total of \$7.1 million over a four-year span. The Department of General Services estimates the District will need to install and keep about 1,327 dispensers in government-owned buildings, excluding schools, which were covered by Pinto’s previous bill.

Pinto said the passage of the bill will seek to improve the lives of menstruating individuals in the District and reinforce the idea that period product access is a necessary and fundamental human right.

“This bill is another step towards overcoming the stigma surrounding menstruation and treating access to period products similarly to toilet paper – a product everyone agrees is a basic necessity and can be readily found in public buildings and places,” Pinto said.

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