 

POSTCARD PARTY #161 FEBRUARY 21, 2020

Sentences that can fit on postcards are highlighted. Write local (including Sheriff Griffin), state (including Governor Cooper) and federal legislators (prisons are under Department of Justice).

Unlike most poverty-related issues, this one is solvable. Along with destigmatizing periods, we are calling for:   
1) Clean and healthy period products to be freely accessible in schools, shelters, and prisons  
2) Eliminate the “tampon tax” - exempt period products from the sales tax in the remaining 35 states

1 in 4 women struggle to afford period products due to a lack of income.

In the first city-wide study on period poverty, it was found that 46% of low-income women had to choose between a meal and period products.

Close to [12 million women across the U.S. aged between 12 and 52 live below poverty line,](https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/adult-poverty-rate-by-gender/?dataView=1&currentTimeframe=0&selectedDistributions=female&sortModel=%7B%22colId%22:%22Location%22,%22sort%22:%22asc%22%7D) and most of them don't have access to sanitary pads. **Currently, neither tampons nor pads are available through government assistance programs like SNAP or Medicaid.**

Because of the period stigma that makes menstruation a taboo topic, we don’t often think about what it’s like for a homeless or low-income menstruator to get their period.

We believe that it is a fundamental human right to be able to discover and reach your full potential, regardless of a natural need. MENSTRUAL HYGIENE IS A RIGHT, NOT A PRIVILEGE.

Period poverty refers to not everyone having access to menstrual products due to a combination of cost and stigma.

Across the United States, [41 percent of kids live in low-income families](https://www.census.gov/topics/income-poverty/poverty.html). Even within that number, there's a huge gender disparity. Nearly 14 percent of girls and women live below the poverty line compared to only 11 percent of boys and men.

This often leads to girls having to resort to makeshift methods such as rolling swaths of toilet paper onto their underwear, which only reinforces the cycle of poverty. Let's not forget the pain and discomfort that comes with menstruation, which is often debilitating.

A box of 52 [Always Ultra-Thin, Overnight Pads with Wings Unscented](https://www.cvs.com/shop/always-ultra-thin-size-4-overnight-pads-with-wings-unscented-52-ct-prodid-1011293?skuid=351201), costs approximately $13.49 at CVS and lasts for about one or two cycles depending on the person. That's about $7 per month per woman — a cost that is far too expensive for someone struggling to make rent or money for food. The situation gets much more dire, of course, when it's a single mom providing for her children while working a low-wage job.

Homeless shelters and nonprofits report that while menstrual products are among the most requested products, the discussions around them are timid.

Stigma, poverty, and a lack of access are three foundational elements that define period poverty in the U.S. today. Some young women resort to using the few tampons they can afford for prolonged periods of time, risking toxic shock syndrome, cervical cancer, and other dangerous infections.

Throughout her cycle, an average woman will spend an upwards personal [budget](https://medium.com/s/bloody-hell/how-much-does-a-period-cost-anyway-6a2263828ae3) of $70-100 dollars a year on menstrual products. Keeping up with a recurring budget like this is taxing and burdening already, and for women without homes, it can be downright impossible.

Although a certain number of homeless shelters across the country provide period products to women, the products themselves are often limited and leave many women to bleed through their clothes and go throughout their day stained.

**The first legislative push: free tampons in all public schools**

It is estimated that the simple lack of access to feminine hygiene supplies in the US keeps one out of five girls home from school during their monthly cycle. These products are a necessity, not a luxury. Please support legislation that provides free period products in our public schools.

Menstrual Equity For All Act of 2019 (Bill in House of Representatives; Congress) NY Rep. Grace Meng introduced a bill would allow states to use federal grant funding to provide students with free menstrual products in schools, require Medicaid to cover the cost of menstrual products for recipients, and require private employers of over 100 employees to provide free menstrual hygiene products for their employees––all of which will help reduce the economic burden on your menstruating constituents. I urge you to say yes to ME4All.

1-20-20 Virginia passed legislation 40-0 for providing free supplies in schools. Funding unknown.

**Menstrual supplies; certain school buildings.** Requires each school board to make tampons and pads available at all times and at no cost to students in the bathrooms of each public school at which any student in grades five through 12 is enrolled and at which at least 40 percent of enrolled students are eligible for free or reduced lunch.

A [recent bill](https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-cuomo-reminds-schools-new-law-requiring-school-districts-provide-free-feminine-hygiene) in New York followed by several other states made it mandatory for schools, correctional facilities, and homeless shelters to provide menstrual hygiene products — a thoughtful decision, but only on surface. The mandate remains unfunded, meaning it's up to the schools and facilities to bear the full cost of services and products.

When it comes to legislation already passed regarding access to tampons in schools, in [California](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2018/01/06/free-tampons-for-girls-an-end-to-meal-shaming-and-more-in-new-state-laws-affecting-schools/?utm_term=.50122fdf501e), some (but not all) schools serving grades 6–12 are required to provide free tampons in all gender neutral and girls’ bathrooms. In [Illinois](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2018/01/06/free-tampons-for-girls-an-end-to-meal-shaming-and-more-in-new-state-laws-affecting-schools/?utm_term=.50122fdf501e), [New York](https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-cuomo-reminds-schools-new-law-requiring-school-districts-provide-free-feminine-hygiene), and [New Hampshire](https://fox8.com/2019/07/21/new-hampshire-law-requires-schools-to-provide-free-pads-and-tampons-to-students/), all schools with grades 6–12 are required to do the same. The city of [Boston](https://www.cnn.com/2019/06/17/health/bps-free-menstrual-products-trnd/index.html)  announced that it will be launching a pilot program with free menstrual products in public schools this fall, [Portland Public Schools](https://www.pdxmonthly.com/articles/2018/10/3/how-two-portland-teens-scored-a-huge-victory-for-menstruation) will now grant $25,000 a year for menstrual products, and a number of other districts are in talks to implement similar policies.

**The second legislative push: eliminate the tampon tax nationwide**

It’s 2020, and yet 35 US States still have a sales tax on period products considering them non-essential items.

The “tampon tax” refers to a state sales tax that would be waived if menstrual products were legally considered “medical necessities.” But in 35 states, tampons and pads are not.

Every month, women experiencing poverty or homelessness struggle to find menstrual products and the discriminatory taxation placed on these products only exacerbates the problem.

While states such as [Nevada, New York, Florida, Connecticut, Illinois, and Washington, D.C.](https://www.teenvogue.com/story/tampon-tax-struck-down-in-nevada-vote), have already eliminated their tampon tax, many others have not. Although legislators introduced bills to get rid of the tax in [22 other states](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/12/us/tampon-tax.html), these efforts have yet to be successful. With that said, [Rhode Island may be next on the list](https://www.wpri.com/news/local-news/rhode-island-state-budget-heads-to-governor-raimondos-desk/).

Soap and toilet paper are also available as a public commodity because there is a civically expected level of hygiene, however since tampons and pads are labeled as "luxury goods," they're somehow exempt from the basic hygiene category.

In the United States, tampons, sanitary napkins, menstrual cups, and other comparable products are still subject to a luxury tax, otherwise known as the [tampon tax](https://cora.life/blogs/day-one/tampon-tax-in-the-us), levied on items not considered basic necessities. [Several countries](https://www.ibtimes.co.uk/tampon-tax-how-does-uk-compare-other-countries-1634278), including Canada, [India](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-44912742), Kenya and Ireland, have all ended sales and value-added taxes on menstrual products.