



# Effort to provide free tampons, pads in school women's restrooms moves in the House



By Robin Opsahi, Iowa Capital Dispatch

A bill to provide free sanitary products in school women's restrooms advanced from an appropriations subcommittee Monday. (Photo by Holly Hildreth/Getty Images)

Lawmakers advanced a proposal Monday to provide state funding for schools to stock free feminine hygiene products in women's restrooms — but it may have a hard time making it to the finish line this session.

House File 883 would provide state funding for schools to have menstrual products like tampons and sanitary pads available in school women's bathrooms for 6th through 12th grade students from July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2028. The bill had received approval in March from the House Education Committee but had not been discussed in the months since.

At a House appropriations subcommittee meeting Monday, Angela Caulk with the Family Planning Council of Iowa, thanked lawmakers for their work "behind the scenes" on the bill, ensuring that it was still in the discussion.

"Just as a woman and someone who was a teenager, I just want to thank you all for this, because I think it can make a big difference," she said.

In earlier meetings on the bill, students and supporters said providing these products for free in school restrooms will help low-income students and help reduce chronic absenteeism at Iowa schools. The measure was brought up in part because of advocacy efforts by the nonprofit Love for Red, an organization focused on providing free sanitary products. Students who created the nonprofit alongside their school counselor said a pilot program providing these products for free led to a reduction in female student absences.

Rep. Amy Nielsen, D-North Liberty, questioned if the funding for the proposal was coming from State Supplemental Aid (SSA), the per-pupil funding for Iowa's K-12 schools — but Rep. Devon Wood, R-New Market, said it was her understanding this proposal would provide new funding from fiscal years 2026 through 2028. The legislation states that after 2028, funding for the measure would come from SSA.

The legislation does not set an exact allocation for providing these products, but states "an amount necessary to fund the full cost of compliance" will come from the state's general fund for the 2026-2028 time period. Wood said she understood questions about the exact funding for this measure, but said the measure will provide needed support for students in difficult situations.



"I think that's an important question to note, so we make sure we know where we're at, budgetarily, going forward with this," Wood said. "But I think if this is something that we can do ... we do need to assess the need to make sure that we're fulfilling that (need)."

As the House Appropriations Committee did not take up the bill at its meeting on Monday, the funding proposal is unlikely to make it into the state's final budget for fiscal year 2026. Rep. Gary Mohr, R-Bettendorf, the committee chair, said there's only one bill outstanding for the committee to consider – the standing appropriations bill – before the committee is done for the year. While the money for feminine hygiene products could come up in this meeting, the bill would also need to pass on the House floor and then go through the committee process in the Senate, as the other chamber has not considered the measure or passed a companion bill this session.

The proposal could be added to another appropriations bill that will make it through the session, but the measure was not included in the budget agreement reached between Senate and House Republicans.

Victoria Sinclair, lobbying on behalf of several organizations including those for Iowa school nurses, school counselors, school psychologists, said her clients have proposed an amendment to remove the spending component of this bill and allow school staff to be able to place donated products in school restrooms. The language has not yet been filed as an amendment to the bill.

"I understand that the appropriation has been a big hold up for many years as we looked at this," Sinclair said. "And it's our understanding that many schools actually do have a decent amount of donated products, as well as folks willing to donate."

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