



# Nebraska bill seeks to place free period products in public school bathrooms



By Marlo Lundak

OMAHA, Neb. (WOWT) - In 2022, the Nebraska legislature voted to remove sales taxes from all period products in the state. Shortly after, the products were made free to all women in detention centers and jails in the state, too.

"Nebraska has made progress on these issues, our sister states have made progress in recent years, and I think the time is right to address this from the education committee's perspective as well," said Sen. Danielle Conrad.

Conrad introduced LB1050 — a bill requiring schools to provide free period products in all school bathrooms.

"This measure is really important to bring forward to raise awareness, to reduce stigma, and to increase equity," Conrad said.

The bill is supported by many community groups, school districts, teachers, and more.

"We provide everything a student needs, we provide them pencils, paper, but even beyond that, basic hygiene, we have napkins in the cafeteria, toilet paper in every bathroom, and this is no different than any other supply that a student might need," said April Jorgensen, a member of Nebraskans for Social Good, who also voiced their support for the bill.

But the bill isn't the brainchild of Senator Conrad, rather, a former Lincoln East High School student, Cassidy Bell, who brought the proposal to her.

"Every girl that goes to a school where period products are not available are experiencing period poverty," Bell said during the education committee meeting Monday night.

She shared a personal story from her high school days, when her period started moments before a history exam. At that moment, she had no feminine products and no time to ask fellow classmates for any, either.

She eventually started an initiative that led to the Lincoln Public School district providing free period products in all the middle and high school bathrooms.

Bell wasn't the only one to share personal testimony, either.



"I unexpectedly got my period and bled through my jeans while I was at school, in class," said 14-year-old middle school student Alyssa Capeka. "I had no menstruation products nor were there any available in the bathroom. I was 11 years old."

Doctors, mothers, school administrators, and students testified in support of the bill, recognizing that period poverty — the inability to afford or access feminine hygiene products — is a very real thing for students of any background.

"Without period products, students are more likely to miss school," said Mindy Diller, a teacher and representative for the Nebraska State Education Association. "By providing tampons and pads, schools can reduce absenteeism, ensuring that students do not miss out on valuable education."

"The free and reduced lunch rate at Grand Island Public Schools exceeds 67%," said Grand Island Public Schools representative Lisa Albers. "These are families that live every day with food insecurity. Buying period products is not a priority when food, rent, and gas need to be purchased. The overall narrative needs to change, paper towels and toilet paper are expected in bathrooms, so why not provide period products?"

"We send products to schools multiple times a week," said Kristin Lowrey, the founder of Access Period.

The organization provides free menstrual products to anyone who needs in Nebraska, either through one of their 10 access points across the state or by distribution through other local non-profits.

Too often, Lowrey says she hears from educators who are buying the expensive products themselves in an attempt to ensure students at their schools have access.

"They've been calling Access Period to look for resources or see if we're able to help, but oftentimes it's not enough," said Lowrey.

Access Period says it's about time Nebraska joins the 25 other states that provide these products at no cost to their state's public school students.

All supporters of the bill also say the availability of feminine products in schools is a step in addressing the stigma around conversations about menstruation, even though it is a natural biological process for 50 percent of humans.

In order to provide free period products to all public schools, it's estimated it would cost \$873,000 per year. If passed, that money would come from the state's general fund, and the program would begin in the 2025-26 school year.

The education committee noted they received 72 emails in support of LB1050, 4 in opposition, and 2 who were neutral.

<https://www.wowt.com/2024/02/13/nebraska-bill-seeks-place-free-period-products-public-school-bathrooms/>