



Lincoln senator assists in getting free access to tampons for female inmates

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Lincoln Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks said Wednesday she had reached an agreement with the state Department of Correctional Services to provide free access to tampons for female inmates.

Pansing Brooks had proposed drafting a bill that would require the department to provide free tampons, but first tried to see if the issue could be resolved without legislation, she said. The department provides generic feminine pads to inmates at no cost, but not tampons, she said. They are considered a luxury item and inmates must purchase them.

The department has agreed to provide free generic tampons, along with non-generic feminine products at cost with no mark-up, she said.

The decision came after Pansing Brooks asked the department to review its policies in light of a recent ACLU of Nebraska report on the issue.

The ACLU responded Wednesday that the decision was a victory for the dignity and respect of Nebraska women.

"We are thankful for the hundreds of Nebraskans who have contacted the Department of Corrections, for the women in Nebraska's prisons who spoke up about their experiences, for the leadership of Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks, and for Director (Scott) Frakes' sound decision to evolve policies," said Scout Richters, of ACLU's legal and policy council.

Pansing Brooks said she had told Frakes she was ready to introduce a bill, but thought they ought to be able to solve the issue without a bill and a hearing.

"I said, 'Who will you send (to the hearing) to explain this?' she said.

Omaha Sen. Ernie Chambers had already written at least a couple of letters to Frakes late last year, saying he was aghast, outraged, unbelieving and other descriptors about the department's





Period Partner

decision to not give the female items to inmates at no cost. In December, he asked for a written explanation from Frakes.

Pansing Brooks said she felt that a woman needed to explain the issue, and she was prepared to do so at the bill's hearing.

So she's happy with Frakes' decision to at least offer the generic brands for free, to be responsive to inmate concerns and to collaborate.

"I am grateful we were able to solve this problem together without legislation," she said.

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