

Governor Phil Murphy

Governor Murphy Signs Bill to Provide Access to Free Menstrual Products for Students in Grades Six through Twelve

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TRENTON – Recognizing that access to affordable menstrual products is key to the health and participation of New Jersey students, Governor Phil Murphy today signed a bill (S-1221/A-1349) requiring school districts to provide menstrual products free of charge in every public school teaching students in one or more of grades six through twelve. By working to address ‘period poverty’ through convenient and free access to menstrual hygiene products in our schools, this legislation builds on the Murphy Administration’s ongoing efforts to equitably advance women’s health in New Jersey.

A study

(https://urldefense.com/v3/_https://t.e2ma.net/click/jo8fxj/bufvrclb/v9g6f5_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtba!PNI5txN4nsc7DBs6z7rhRCol) 2021 found that nearly one in four teenagers throughout the United States struggle to afford menstrual products, especially students of color and those from low-income families. Access to menstrual hygiene products helps students focus on learning and prevents unnecessary infections that can cause chronic reproductive health challenges.

Under the new law, applicable schools will be required to provide menstrual products in at least half of all their female and gender-neutral bathrooms. Any costs incurred by a school district in supplying menstrual products to meet the needs of its students will be borne by the State.

“When students can’t access the menstrual products they need for their reproductive health, the potential stress and stigma too often distracts them from their classes or forces them to skip school entirely – leading to social and academic repercussions that no one should have to face,” **said Governor Murphy**. “My Administration will continue to prioritize the mental and physical health of New Jersey students by taking a holistic approach to supporting their well-being. Promoting menstrual equity in our schools is one crucial component of our ongoing efforts to ensure the success of young people throughout our state and promote equity at every level.”

The legislation also requires the New Jersey Departments of Education, in conjunction with the New Jersey Department of Health, to periodically assess whether the provision of these products is meeting the needs of menstruating students. If deemed necessary, the department can then issue a recommendation regarding the expansion of access to free menstrual products in grades below grade six.

This legislation builds upon the Murphy Administration’s other efforts to promote menstrual health in New Jersey. In 2019, the Administration required menstrual hygiene products to be provided free of charge to female inmates in the state correctional system. In addition, the Department of Health has created a website (https://urldefense.com/v3/_https://t.e2ma.net/click/jo8fxj/bufvrclb/b2h6f5_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtba!PNI5txN4nsc7DBs6z7rhRCol) provide residents with critical information about common menstrual health-related matters.

“Governor Murphy’s visionary initiative to make menstrual products freely available in our middle and high schools is monumental progress towards achieving menstrual equity in our education system,” **said Dr. Angelica Allen-McMillan, Acting Commissioner of Education**. “Menstrual hygiene should never hinder a student’s ability to fully engage and thrive in the classroom. By providing free access to these essential products, we are not only promoting health and well-being but also erasing a potential source of discomfort and stigma. This step underscores our dedication to fostering an environment where all students can focus on their education without the burden of unmet basic needs. It is a stride towards a more just and inclusive educational experience.”

“Having supplies for periods or menstrual cycles in our public schools helps to reduce inequities by increasing access to necessary products that may not be readily available to everyone,” **said Acting Health Commissioner Dr. Kaitlan Baston**. “This initiative will not only provide needed support to many school-aged kids with periods, it can also help normalize periods,

help people overcome potential embarrassment or distress from not having what they need, and can support positive self-esteem. More information on period issues and products can be found at nj.gov/health/periods (https://urldefense.com/v3/__https://t.e2ma.net/click/jo8fxj/bufvrclb/rui6f5__!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!PNI5txN4nsc7DBs6z7rhRCoK)

The bill is sponsored by Senate Majority Leader Teresa Ruiz and Assemblywoman Gabriela Mosquera, as well as Senator Vin Gopal and Assemblywomen Carol Murphy and Angela McKnight.

"A national study found that more than four in five teens have either missed class themselves or know someone who has missed class time because they did not have access to period products," **said Senate Majority Leader Ruiz**. "Menstrual hygiene products are a necessity, not a luxury. When this becomes an obstacle and decisions are made to not attend school, the loss is greater than just the one day. It is about the stigma young girls face around this natural monthly occurrence. This new policy will help to address period poverty and the stigmas around menstruation head on."

"Today, New Jersey becomes the twenty-third state in the country to provide menstrual products in schools," **said Assemblywoman Mosquera**. "Menstrual products are not a luxury, but a necessity. Providing students with menstrual products is not only the right thing to do, but it is also good public policy that has been proven to lower school absentee rates. I thank Governor Murphy for signing this legislation, which will ensure future generations of New Jersey students have access to proper hygiene products."

"Too many New Jersey families are put in a position where they have to choose between paying their bills or affording common living expenses such as menstrual hygiene products. With this new law, we are directly addressing persisting gaps in access that have caused New Jersey students to go without essential menstrual hygiene products," **said Assemblywoman Murphy**. "By making these products available in our schools free of charge, we are putting our young people first."

"Right now, there are students in our state and across the country who are missing school because they cannot afford menstrual hygiene products. It's unacceptable and we must do more," **said Assemblywoman McKnight**. "I am proud to have sponsored this legislation that will put free menstrual products in our schools so all of our students, regardless of their family's income level, will have access to the resources they need to thrive."

"I am proud of the work we have accomplished and excited to continue raising awareness around period poverty. No one should be forced to go without feminine hygiene products because they can't afford them," **said Assemblywoman Shanique Speight**. "By making it a priority to provide resources for women and girls to rely on, we are giving crucial support to our communities and bridging gaps that prevent New Jerseyans from accessing important menstrual health care."

"We are thrilled to have passed an inclusive law with gender neutral language that gives all menstruating students, in New Jersey's best-in-the-nation public education system, access to period products in their school's bathrooms," **said Anjali Mehrotra, founder of the Equality, Period. NJ coalition**. "While the ability to access menstrual products primarily affects students in low-income communities, we have heard firsthand accounts of students missing school for lack of access to menstrual products in both low income and affluent districts across the state. We thank both Governor Murphy and our champion, Senate Majority Leader Ruiz for helping ensure that all students will have equal access to education enabling them to reach their full potential, irrespective of gender or family income level."

"It is critical to education that we de-stigmatize menstruation," **said Elise Joy, Executive Director/Co-Founder of Girls Helping Girls. Period**. "This law recognizes that, as a society, we have an obligation to meet basic needs for all students, including those who get periods. We are so proud to have worked with lawmakers to craft a bill that is thoughtful, compassionate, and an example for other states."

"At Aunt Flow

(https://urldefense.com/v3/__https://t.e2ma.net/click/jo8fxj/bufvrclb/7mj6f5__!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!PNI5txN4nsc7DBs6z7rhRCoK) ask, 'If toilet paper is offered for free, why aren't pads and tampons?' We are thrilled that New Jersey has officially joined the Menstrual Movement, ensuring access to students across the state," **said Claire Coder, Founder and CEO of Aunt Flow**. "Aunt Flow is proud to support 750+ schools across the U.S. that stock their bathrooms with Aunt Flow's organic cotton period products, and now, we're ready for New Jersey."

"As a pioneer in the fight for menstrual equity in New Jersey, the National Council of Jewish Women/Essex County is proud to have been a driving force, and even more proud to have worked side-by-side with our coalition partners, to reach this landmark achievement. Making menstrual products available in NJ schools affords all students equal opportunities to learn and study without shame or stigma or lost chances for education," **said Laurie Kahn, Vice President of Advocacy at National Council of Jewish Women/Essex County**. "We extend our gratitude to the bill's sponsors, Assemblywomen Mosquera, McKnight and Murphy, and to Senators Ruiz and Gopal, as well as the many, many co-sponsors. And we are thankful for the unanimous support of the full NJ State Legislature, which recognized the urgent need to pass this groundbreaking legislation. Thank you, Governor Murphy for your signature and support today. Now, the real work begins!"

“This legislation stands as a crucial step within New Jersey's continuous and inclusive endeavor to tackle the diverse factors impacting student attendance,” **said Lauren Albrecht, Director of Advocacy and Organizing at Garden State Equality.** “We extend our gratitude to Governor Murphy for championing this – recognizing that a significant portion of the population faces challenges due to menstruation, with over half of the menstruating community citing it as a barrier to education and employment, this stride plays a role in bridging these disparities. Garden State Equality takes pride in actively backing the drive to ensure this legislation caters to the needs of all menstruating students, fostering inclusivity and justice.”

“As a high school student myself, I could not be more enthused about this bill's passage,” **said Rachel Glantzberg, PERIOD.'s New Jersey Community Organizer.** “The passage of S1221/A1349 will undoubtedly be one step closer to supporting menstruators in NJ schools. But more importantly, it is a step towards lessening the inequities borne by menstruators. It is a step towards equality.”

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