



January 25, 2022

The Honorable Grace Meng
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Rep. Meng,

On behalf of the American College of Physicians (ACP), I am writing to express our strong support for the Menstrual Equity For All Act of 2021 (H.R. 3614), a bill that would improve access to necessary menstrual hygiene products. ACP shares your concern around the social and economic barriers that exist around accessing menstrual hygiene products and education in the United States—particularly for vulnerable populations including school-aged individuals, those experiencing homelessness, low-income individuals, and incarcerated individuals. We commend you for beginning a dialogue on this important and often neglected issue and taking the steps to begin to address the health implications of period poverty and social drivers of health more generally.

The American College of Physicians is the largest medical specialty organization and the second-largest physician membership society in the United States. ACP members include 161,000 internal medicine physicians (internists), related subspecialists, and medical students. Internal medicine physicians are specialists who apply scientific knowledge and clinical expertise to the diagnosis, treatment, and compassionate care of adults across the spectrum from health to complex illness. Internal medicine specialists treat many of the patients at greatest risk from COVID-19, including the elderly and patients with pre-existing conditions like diabetes, heart disease and asthma.

Menstrual hygiene products, including tampons, pads, reusable menstrual cups, and other products, are important health tools for managing periods for the more than 800,000,000 people globally who menstruate on any given day. The [average person who menstruates](#) has their period for a cumulative 7 years of their life, uses between 10 to 35 pads or tampons per cycle, and uses up to 16,800 products over the course of their lifetime [at a cost of roughly \\$1,800 in the U.S.](#) However, despite the role of menstrual products in maintaining hygiene and health, many Americans are unable to afford or otherwise lack access to these basic necessities. In [one study](#), 64 percent of low-income women were unable to afford needed menstrual hygiene products in the past year while 21 percent experienced this monthly; 46 percent couldn't afford both food and menstrual hygiene products in the past year.

Those experiencing homelessness or who are incarcerated have also reported limited access to menstrual hygiene products, especially since these products are rarely publicly funded in budgets for schools, shelters, and crisis emergency centers. They are also not readily available in all correction and detention facilities and are often prohibitively expensive given meager prison wages and inflated prices. Additionally, [menstrual hygiene products](#) are generally not covered by public health and nutritional programs and are not exempt from sales tax in many jurisdictions like other necessities are.

As a result, [some people who menstruate have been reported](#) to resort to other unsafe or unsanitary options, including using things like rags, tissues, toilet paper, paper towels, dirty socks, used paper bags, or a single tampon or pad for longer than the recommended time. Inadequate or improper use of menstrual hygiene products can have devastating medical consequences and may possibly result in urinary tract infections, vulvar contact dermatitis, yeast infections, bacterial vaginosis, (and, in rare cases, toxic shock syndrome), and overall low quality of life.

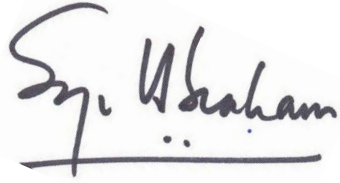
Insufficient access to menstrual hygiene products clearly poses a threat to overall public health. [ACP supports](#) public policies that reduce socioeconomic inequalities, address downstream social drivers of health, reduce health disparities, and improve health equity. We applaud that the Menstrual Equity For All Act of 2021 would undertake several measures to address access to menstrual hygiene products, including allowing federal grant funds to be used to provide free menstrual hygiene products in schools; incentivizing colleges and universities to provide free menstrual products; ensuring access to free menstrual products for incarcerated individuals; allowing homeless shelter federal grant funds to be used to purchase menstrual products; requiring Medicaid to cover menstrual products; directing large employers (100+ employees) to provide employees with free menstrual products in the workplace; and requiring all public federal buildings to provide free menstrual products in restrooms.

[ACP has long believed](#) that women should have access to affordable, comprehensive, and nondiscriminatory health care coverage over the course of their life. This, too, should include access to affordable menstrual hygiene products. [ACP policy supports](#) greater investment in public policy interventions that address social drivers of health and other factors that negatively impact health and supports federal, state, tribal, and local funding efforts to address social drivers of health, as this legislation does. The College also strongly believes that additional efforts are needed to close gaps in the knowledge related to women's health issues.

We commend your leadership in giving this issue the attention it deserves. In order to address social drivers of health and promote health equity, it is imperative that Congress pursue policies that eliminate unnecessary barriers to menstrual hygiene products, as this legislation does. The policy changes outlined in this bill would make significant strides in increasing access to menstrual hygiene products for millions of individuals, and particularly for low-income individuals, individuals experiencing homelessness, incarcerated individuals, and students.

Please contact Jared Frost, Senior Associate, Legislative Affairs at jfrost@acponline.org if you have any questions or need any additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "George M. Abraham". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

George M. Abraham, MD, MPH, MACP, FIDSA
President