



Maine Women's Lobby

THE VOICE OF MAINE WOMEN

Testimony of Whitney Parrish

Maine Women's Lobby

In support of LD 628

An Act to Ensure Comprehensive Access to Menstrual Products in All Maine's Jails, County Correctional Facilities and State Correctional and Detention Facilities

March 8, 2019

Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, my name is Whitney Parrish, Director of Policy and Program for the Maine Women's Lobby. The Maine Women's Lobby is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, statewide membership organization devoted to raising the economic, social, and political status of Maine's 678,000 women and girls.

I am pleased to speak to you today in support of LD 628, *An Act To Ensure Comprehensive Access to Menstrual Products in All Maine's Jails, County Correctional Facilities and State Correctional and Detention Facilities*.

The Federal Bureau of Prisons announced in 2017 that people who menstruate in their facilities would be guaranteed unlimited access to pads and tampons, but this only accounts for less than 10% of incarcerated people who have menstrual cycles.¹ When I am not with you here, I spend much of my free time advocating on behalf of incarcerated individuals here in Maine. The number one concern I hear from our female-identified incarcerated Mainers is the need for gender-responsive services and staff; a recognition that they have different needs than their male counterparts, but that there are special considerations to be made when working with female-identified individuals. Hygiene products, underwear, and access to menstrual products are heavily cited.

Women, trans, and gender non-conforming people have little to no control over their menstrual cycles. Now, imagine you're a person who has their period inside of a correctional facility. You still go to work, you attend classes and groups, and though it's within the confines of a building you cannot leave, you still experience public life. You're given a limited supply of menstrual products per month, often of low quality due to cost saving, and when you run out, you're out. You could experience the shame attached to bleeding through your limited supply of clothing or even just asking for what you need, and you are more prone to inhumane treatment and humiliation from staff. You may have no money to go to commissary, and if you do, you may have to weigh that purchase against other necessities, like making phone calls to your children or attorney. You are forced to make the impossible decision of constructing your own menstrual products, using anything from clothing or notebook paper in place of a tampon.

¹ O'Connor, Lydia. "Federal Prisons Made Menstrual Products Free. Now Some States May Follow Suit." 2018. Accessed at https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/state-prison-free-pads-tampons_us_5a7b427be4b08dfc92ff5231

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Without adequate access to clean and hygienic menstrual products, you may face serious health consequences. This happens every single month, and for some with irregular cycles, more frequently. Menstrual products are not a luxury item by any means. They are a medically necessary staple for all people who menstruate.

Prisons were designed with men in mind. As the population of incarcerated women and female-identified people grows nationwide and across Maine, we need to be looking intentionally and thoughtfully as to why that is. In the meantime, we need to ensure that we are adhering to gender-responsive policies that minimize shame and promote the ability for incarcerated people to heal from the trauma that brought them into a correctional institution in the first place. Worrying every month about whether they will be shamed for experiencing a natural bodily process should not compound trauma and inhibit healing and growth. LD 628 is a major step toward promoting and ensuring the dignity of incarcerated people. We strongly urge you to vote ought to pass on LD 628. Thank you for your time.