VERMONT
COMMISSION ON WOMEN

FEBRUARY 2021

ACCESS TO MENSTRUAL SUPPLIES

In 2021, a bill regarding menstrual products, S.32, was introduced in the Vermont Senate to ensure all students who menstruate have free, immediate access to menstrual supplies within their school restrooms, and another bill, H.260 was introduced to require availability in public school restrooms and correctional facilities.

Two additional bills, H.53 & S.53 were introduced to remove the non-essential items tax. Let's take a deeper look at the impact they may have, and how other states have approached this:

At Home:

In a 2019 study of low-income women, 2/3 reported not having the resources to buy menstrual products at some point during the last year, and 1/5 of respondents struggled to afford them on a monthly basis.

In Vermont, 22.7 percent of single-parent households headed by women live in poverty. That means 1 in every 4 single mothers in Vermont struggle to meet basic needs such as food and housing, then face the additional burden of buying menstrual products at a taxed rate for "non-essential" items. SNAP benefits do not cover menstrual products.

At School:

According to a recent study, a startling 1 in 5 teens have struggled to afford menstrual supplies or have not been able to purchase them at all, and 1 in 4 teens have missed class due to the lack of access.

During the Pandemic:

35% Increase in demand for free period products

reported by *I Support the Girls*, an organization providing free menstrual products to those in need in the U.S. and internationally.

OTHER STATES

Taxation of Menstrual Supplies

Of the 45 states with sales tax, 30 still impose a tax on menstrual products. In the Northeast, Vermont and Maine collect sales tax on menstrual supplies, while New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Delaware do not.

Most recently, Washington & Utah eliminated sales tax on menstrual supplies, and Virginia reduced the tax rate on menstrual supplies.

> ***Eliminating the discriminatory tampon tax isn't a legislative nicety or a budgetary option. It is a legal mandate. Period.***
>
> - Erwin Chemerinsky, dean, UC Berkeley Law School & Jennifer Weiss-Wolf, co-founder, Period Equity

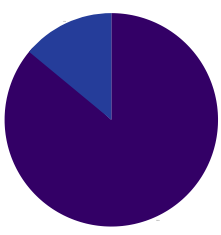
Access in Schools

Students who menstruate at schools in Denver, Colorado, Eugene, Oregon, California, Illinois, New Hampshire, New York, and Virginia have access to free menstrual products in school bathrooms. Low-income communities in Georgia have access at schools and community centers. Similar bills have been introduced in states including Arizona, Alabama, Connecticut, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, New Jersey, New Hampshire, Maryland, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Washington. Many colleges and universities now provide menstrual supplies in restrooms, as well.

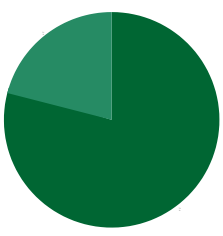
Access in Correctional Facilities

Access to menstrual supplies in correctional facilities varies by state, though the ACLU reports 13 states have laws requiring incarcerated individuals have freely available access to the supplies they need. These states include Alabama, California, Colorado, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, New York, Tennessee, Utah, and Virginia.

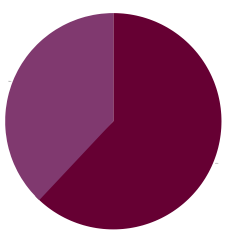
Respondents, when surveyed about starting their period in public unexpectedly:



86% didn't have the supplies they needed

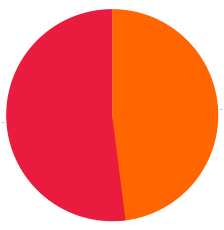


79% improvised with toilet paper or something else



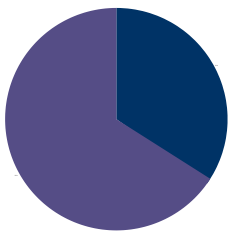
62% went to a store immediately to buy supples

53% asked someone else for menstrual supplies



48% obtained supplies from a dispenser in a public restroom.

Only 8% said that dispensers in public restrooms work all the time.



34% went home immediately to get supplies.

Source: Free the Tampons

women.vermont.gov

Special thanks to volunteer Emily Pocock for her contributions!