

Provide Free Period Products for all Menstruating People in Wales

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 13 Medi 2020
Petitions Committee | 13 September 2020

Reference: SR21/00497

Petition Number: P-06-1177

Petition title: Provide Free Period Products for all Menstruating People in Wales

Text of petition:

The £3.1 million provided to schools in Wales to purchase sanitary products is not enough to keep all young women out of period poverty and stay in education. Having experienced period embarrassment first-hand, I know how it feels to sit through a lesson, bleeding through my sanitary product because I was too embarrassed to ask a friend, or a teacher, if I could borrow a panty liner. We need to end the stigma around periods, and give all women free sanitary products. 1 in 10 girls aged 14-21 in the UK can't afford sanitary products. 49% of girls have missed a day of school because of this. Young girls are risking their physical health by making improvised sanitary products from tissue, socks and plastic bags. This isn't just an issue for young teenagers 56% of 18-24 year olds have had to go a day without period essentials, or cut down on them due to lack of funds. Many women are embarrassed by their periods, and are even embarrassed about buying necessary sanitary products for them. This shame is incredibly harmful as it prevents necessary conversations about periods, which ultimately leads to a lack of knowledge of the implications that come with menstruating. For example, the lack of effective menstrual cramp pain relief, which is shown to reduce classroom performance.



1. Background

Period poverty is a lack of access to sanitary products as a result of financial constraints. Period dignity relates to addressing period poverty, whilst also ensuring products are free and accessible to all people who menstruate in the most practical and dignified way.

A 2017 survey by Plan International UK, a global children’s charity, found that of 1000 girls aged 14 to 21 years old, 10% were unable to afford sanitary products, Lucy Russell, UK Campaign Manager said:

Distributing products at school, including reusables, could play a role in ensuring that no girl struggles to afford sanitary wear.

Another survey by Plan International UK during the first Covid lockdown in 2020 found that 30% of girls aged 14-21 had issues with either affording or accessing sanitary wear in lockdown. Plan International UK said it welcomed free period products being made available in schools but with schools and youth centres closed during lockdown, many girls had been left not knowing where to access free resources.

Previously across the UK, 5% VAT was added to sanitary products, including tampons, pads and towels. The UK Government removed this so-called “tampon tax” at the start of 2021.

In 2020, Scotland became the first country in the world to ensure that period products are obtainable free of charge.

2. Welsh Government action

On 23 March 2018, the Welsh Government announced £1 million of new funding to tackle period poverty and dignity in Wales. £440,000 was allocated over two years to local authorities to tackle period poverty in local communities, with an additional £700,000 of capital funding made available to improve facilities and equipment in schools. Julie James, then Leader of the House and Chief Whip said:

It is unacceptable that some women and girls in Wales cannot afford to buy essential feminine hygiene products when they need them. I am committed to doing everything I can to tackle this inequality.

On 5 March 2019, the Welsh Government announced free sanitary products to all women in Welsh hospitals. The then Minister for Health and Social Services, Vaughan Gething said:

Currently the provision of sanitary products for hospital inpatients varies across Wales as each health board has their own policy. I want to ensure all women admitted to hospital in Wales can access these essential products.

A Period Dignity Grant for Schools was announced on 15 April 2019 by the First Minister, which comprised £2.3 million of funding to provide girls in Welsh primary and secondary school with a range of sanitary products. The grant would provide over 141,000 girls with a range of sanitary products.

The First Minister, Mark Drakeford, said:

It is essential ample sanitary products, as well as good facilities, are available to all female learners so they can manage their periods with confidence and remove what is an unnecessary barrier to their education.

As part of the Period Dignity Grant, schools were encouraged to support reuseable, environmentally sustainable products to allow maximum choice for learners.

In December 2019 the Welsh Government committed funding to tackle period poverty, with £3.3 million set aside for 2020-21. £3.1 million was made available to primary and secondary schools and colleges to provide free sanitary products to students who might need them. Additionally, the Welsh Government committed to continue to provide £220,000 for local authorities to provide free period products in public buildings, such as libraries, with local authorities able to decide how to use this funding in their own local areas. The then Deputy Minister and Chief Whip Jane Hutt said:

We've made considerable progress in tackling poverty in 2019 and the £3.3m for 2020-21 will mean we can continue to ensure period dignity for every women and girl in Wales by providing appropriate products and facilities.

3. Welsh Parliament action

The Senedd held a debate and passed a motion on 2 May 2018 on period poverty and stigma; brought forward by Jane Hutt and Jenny Rathbone. The motion called on the Welsh Government to consider research on the potential impact of period poverty and stigma on learning, to improve education on the subject and to provide free access to sanitary items in education institutions and through foodbanks.

A petition submitted by Malpas Women's Institute was considered by the Petitions Committee on 12 February 2019 calling for the provision of free sanitary products to all women in low income households.

4. Action across the UK

The UK Government introduced a period product scheme to provide free period products for all learners in 2019. The latest [guidance](#) (16 December 2020) states that all learners in state-maintained school and 16 to 19 education organisations in England will continue to have access to free period products in their place of study in 2021.

The [Scottish Parliament brought in a law](#) (12 January 2021) making period products available for free to people who need them. Under the Bill schools, colleges and universities must make a range of period products available for free, in their toilets.

The [Northern Ireland executive approved a pilot](#) (17 December 2020) to make period products freely available to pupils in primary and secondary schools. The three year pilot is projected to cost £2.6 million. Education Minister, Peter Weir said:

Providing free period products will help pupils manage their periods confidently as school, reduce anxiety and stress and enable students to focus on their learning.

In [May 2021](#), the Northern Ireland Economy Minister Diane Dodds announced a one year pilot to provide free period products for university students. The Minister said:

This issue has the potential to seriously impact on students in higher education. Preventing attendance at classes, work placements, and even examinations could seriously hamper an individual's chances of successful completion of their course.

The pilot will run during the academic year for students attending Ulster University, Queen's University Belfast, Stranmillis University College and St Mary's University College.

5. Welsh Government response to the petition

The Minister for Social Justice, Jane Hutt MS, responded to the petition on 6 August 2021. She highlighted that the Welsh Government's [Programme for Government 2021 - 2026](#) includes commitments to embed period dignity in schools and expand free period provision in communities and the private sector.

The Minister said that work had begun on a draft Period Dignity Strategic Action Plan, but that its publication was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A revised plan is expected to be published for consultation later this year.

The Plan will include a wide range of actions linked to education, health, tackling period poverty, access to appropriate facilities and environmental issues. It will aim to tackle the stigma, myths, misunderstandings and lack of knowledge which persist as this will be key to ensuring people understand periods, are confident to talk about them and seek help or advice when needed, whether they have periods or not.

The Minister said she would welcome the views of the petitioner as part of the consultation on the Period Dignity Strategic Action Plan in the autumn.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.