

P-05-863 Call on the Welsh Government to provide free sanitary products to all women in low income households, Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 17.02.20

I am most grateful that you have afforded me an extended period of time in which to respond to the papers relating to our petition.

I particularly applaud the move towards reusable menstrual products. This is not just good for the environment, it ensures the female has a ready supply of products for use during holidays and emergencies. I would like to see the use of reusable products to be prioritized over all others, and single use products phased out completely.

I felt that the responses you link to, whilst not in any way wrong, do not go nearly far enough to address the twin underlying problems of poverty and stigmatization, so, if I may, I would like to take another forward step and envisage the world as we would wish to see it in relation to the availability of sanitary products for women and girls of low income.

Menstruation has been seen as an inconvenience, an illness, a psychosis and a downright curse. In some cultures menstruation labels the woman as unclean and she is outcast. Menstruation is in fact a gift, an enabler and the fore-bringer of life, and attitudes need to change. Action on period poverty could enable new paradigms.

1. It seems to me that one of the biggest issues facing women and girls is that of stigmatization of periods. We urgently need to overcome this, as despite the availability of free products, there will be those who are simply too embarrassed to ask for them. Any single topic which affects more than half the population is an issue which affects us all. Whilst I accept that the remedy for this is probably generational, the only time to start normalizing menstruation is now. Therefore I would ask that the Committee recommends that boys and men are included in all initiatives. We have brothers, fathers, sons and male friends, and each of them should feel empowered and informed to both disseminate information about period products, and obtain them for their female friends and relatives when necessary. Lets dump the taboo.
2. We have left the EU, and can now reduce VAT at will. It is therefore possible to reduce VAT on women's menstrual products to zero. This is, after all, a tax on being a woman, and should be abolished on the grounds of discrimination.
3. I understand that a scattergun approach to the delivery of menstrual products is a useful way of discerning best practice, and should be used as a stepping stone to harmonization. In fact, rarely does the scattergun approach mature to a single delivery method (kerbside recycling being an example). I would put forward that just as family planning products are available on the NHS, so should reusable female sanitary products be available on repeat prescription. The hidden benefits to this are professional consultation, privacy, and the opportunity for a holistic approach to an individual' overall needs.
4. I would hope that it would also be possible to provide sustainable sanitary products to Welsh students of low income studying outside Wales. This will remove the extra expense at a time when many students are low on financial means.

Clearly the abolition of poverty is beyond the scope of this petition, and I trust the WG has a strategy for that.

My best regards,

Pippa

Pippa Bartolotti, on behalf of Malpas WI