



# REPRODUCTIVE EQUITY NOW

## Menstrual Product and Poverty Fact Sheet

- Menstrual products cannot be purchased with federal assistance funds, such as food stamps.<sup>1</sup>
  - Still, the average cost for a pack of menstrual pads increased by 8.3% and the average cost for a box of tampons increased 9.8% in the last year.<sup>2</sup>
  - Even before the pandemic and supply chain shortages caused price increases, 64% of one group surveyed expressed difficulty affording menstrual products in the past year; for 21% of the group surveyed this was a monthly problem.<sup>3</sup>
- As a result of lack of menstrual supplies, one-third of the low-income individuals self-reported missing work, school or similar events.

Mass NOW, an organization advocating on behalf of ending period poverty, distributed a “[State of Menstrual Access Survey](#)” to school nurses, shelter administrators, and Department of Corrections personnel in the Commonwealth. Across the state, Mass 230 schools, all six county correctional facilities, and multiple homeless shelters responded. These findings indicate that:

- Inability to access menstrual products affects students’ class attendance and productivity, with 56% of school nurses reporting having observed students missing class to obtain menstrual products.
- Inconsistency in policies across schools forces many nurses to pay out of pocket for students’ menstrual products.
  - 24% of respondents said products are paid for (at least in part) by donations.
  - 17% of respondents said products are paid for (at least in part) by staff.
  - 89% of respondents said their school had no policy of providing menstrual products to students.
- Approximately 1 out of 7 children in MA is living in poverty and struggles to pay for menstrual products.

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<sup>1</sup> Linda Carroll, Even in the U.S., poor women often can't afford tampons, pads, Reuters (Jan. 10, 2019), available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-menstruation-usa-idUSKCN1P42TX>.

<sup>2</sup> The numbers behind the feminine product shortage, NielsenIQ (Jun. 17, 2022), available at <https://nielseniq.com/global/en/insights/analysis/2022/the-numbers-behind-the-feminine-product-shortage/>

<sup>3</sup> Linda Carroll, *supra* note 1.



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- Massachusetts shelters report menstrual products are among the least donated items to homeless shelters and 25% of responding shelters reported that their shelter does not provide menstrual products.
- While all 6 County facilities reported distribution plans for providing free menstrual products, only 2 have documented policies. Documented policies are important because restricted access to menstrual products means that they can be used as bargaining chips and tools of control.