

Scottish Parliament Local Government and Communities Committee Call for Views:  
Period Products (Free Provision) Scotland Bill  
November 2019

The Consultation

The Bill was introduced in the Scottish Parliament on 23 April 2019. It is a Member's Bill, i.e. a non-Government Bill that has been put forward by Monica Lennon, MSP for Central Scotland.

The aim of the Bill is to ensure everyone in Scotland who needs to use period products can obtain them free of charge through a "period products scheme" which the Scottish Government would have to set up. The Bill requires primary and secondary schools, colleges and universities to make period products free in all appropriate toilets and enables Ministers to place a similar duty on other organisations.

Those using the scheme must be able to obtain period products "reasonably easily" and with "reasonable privacy", and can choose to have products delivered or collected. The scheme must also ensure that a choice of different types of period products are available. Under the Bill, Scottish Ministers must publicise the scheme and may compensate those obliged to provide free products.

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC)

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) is funded to engage with women throughout Scotland in order that their views might influence public policy. The SWC uses the views of women to respond to a variety of Parliamentary, Governmental and organisational consultation papers at both a Scottish and UK level.

The Scottish Women's Convention engages with women using numerous communication channels including Roadshow events, Thematic Conferences and regional contact groups. This submission provides the views of women and reflects their opinions and experiences in a number of key areas relevant to the issues around period dignity.

[The Bill has been brought forward partly in response to concerns about "period poverty" - difficulty in being able to afford period products. Do you think period poverty is a serious issue in Scotland? Please provide any relevant information you may have to support your views.](#)

Yes. The SWC believes that period poverty is a serious issue within Scotland. The inability to access appropriate sanitary provision for women has been a hidden issue for decades and is often the invisible side of poverty.

There are a range of experiences the SWC has heard from women concerning the anxiety and stress that being unable to afford sanitary products brings. The humiliation and health implications felt by many women is illustrative of the stigma still attached to a natural process. This leaves many dreading the time where they have to choose between sanitary protection and other necessities. These items are not luxuries, they are basic essentials that all women should have access to.

[Do you support the overall aim of the Bill - that no one in Scotland should have to pay for period products and that this should be set out in law?](#)

Yes. Period products are not often discussed in a policy context but are raised again and again amongst women. The SWC believes that all women have the right to free sanitary products. Period dignity affects *all* women, regardless of their ability to afford adequate sanitary provision. This Bill has the potential to significantly alter attitudes and help to alleviate "period stigma".

The SWC has spoken to many women throughout Scotland about the continuing rise in food bank usage. A central discussion but one rarely mentioned in political dialogue, is the poverty faced in terms of access to hygiene, toiletries and sanitary provision.

*"We don't really talk about hygiene poverty, but it's just as big a problem as not being able to eat."*

There are a wide variety of reasons for menstruation such as post-natal bleeding, endometriosis and other health conditions. This has the potential to not only make periods even heavier and painful, leading to further financial stress, but also means women may have to take leave from work or education. This not only reinforces the narrative around keeping menstruation hidden but can also leave women out of pocket.

In pressing for this particular piece of legislation, we can challenge and ultimately change outdated attitudes to menstruation. Ensuring that adequate provision is in place and enshrined within legislation can play a key role in eradicating period poverty.

[The Scottish Government already has a scheme for free period products across schools, colleges and universities. Some public bodies also provide free products voluntarily. Do you have any experience of such schemes? If so, do they seem to you to be effective?](#)

The statutory requirement for schools, colleges and universities in Scotland to provide menstrual products makes Scotland a world leader in tackling period stigma. This should be pushed further to ensure that all workplaces in the public, private and third sector have access to free sanitary provision.

The current scheme for educational establishments has been viewed in an overwhelmingly positive light by women across Scotland. Women have highlighted the capacity of such provision to tackle old fashioned attitudes towards menstruation whilst also ensuring a dialogue continues around free sanitary products. Not only has this helped in highlighting that sanitary provision should be a basic requirement for all women, but has also went some way to publicising the issue of period dignity for being a basis of women's inequality as a whole.

[The Bill would allow the Scottish Government to require organisations other than schools and colleges to provide free period products. Do you support this? If so, what other organisations should be legally made to provide free products?](#)

Providing what is basic essentials to women should be routine in *all* workplaces. The fact that this is not the case is symbolic of the wider inequality and discrimination that women continue to face.

Inaccessibility to suitable products not only deepens inequality but also renders some women and girls unable to partake in certain activities, schooling and employment as a result. Schemes currently in place have not only been beneficial to those using facilities but have also led to an encouragement of uptake by certain companies within the private sector voluntarily.

Adult women experience period poverty to the extent that days at work can be missed. The increase in precarious working coupled with a lack of statutory sick pay means that many women may lose out on the little economic freedom they currently have due to a lack of such provision. The SWC particularly commends the work of all women's organisations throughout Scotland and women within the trade union movement for ensuring that this issue has been consistently highlighted.

The Bill requires the setting up of a scheme for making free period products available. Do you have any views on what elements a scheme should include? In answering this question, you might want to take account of factors such as the importance of privacy, accessibility, value for money and the environment.

Any legislation which carries with it the basis for furthering women's equality should take account of ensuring a wholesale approach which encompasses how implementation can be most successful. This would include prioritising accessibility through tackling ongoing stigma around period dignity and encouraging campaigns around uptake of such provision by all women. This not only encourages private workplaces to provide products, but also creates grounds where women do not feel uncomfortable or ashamed in discussing what is a normal issue.

In terms of the environmental impact, all efforts should be made to ensure that period products are plastic-free. This should include working with organisations that manufacture in a socially responsible way with a clear commitment to not using materials which are detrimental to this vital issue.

#### Conclusion:

The SWC welcomes the opportunity to respond to this call for views to make provision for free period products available for anyone who needs them. Creating legislation which ensures accessibility to sanitary provision is a clear step forward in terms of women's equality.

**For further information, please contact**

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