

American Civil Liberties Union of Wisconsin Supports AB-736

Good Morning, Chair Kaufert, Vice-Chair O'Connor, and Honorable Members of the Assembly Committee on Corrections.

My name is Jonathan McCray Jones, and I'm here to speak on behalf of the ACLU of Wisconsin in support of Assembly Bill 736 requiring free access to menstrual products in Wisconsin jails and prisons.

This bill exists because no one should be punished for menstruating. Menstruation is not a choice, a behavior, or a moral failing. It is a basic bodily function, and when access to menstrual products is restricted or priced out of reach, the result is not discipline or accountability, but humiliation and harm.

We have seen, both in Wisconsin and across the country, what happens when incarcerated people are denied proper menstrual care. People are forced to ration pads, use toilet paper, bleed through their clothes, or barter food and other necessities just to manage a period. Some are disciplined for soiling uniforms or bedding when they had no access to products in the first place. That is not justice. It's unnecessary cruelty and dehumanization.

Menstrual products are a medical necessity. Without them, people face higher risks of infection, pain, and long-term health complications. Treating these products as optional or conditional turns a health need into a control mechanism. This bill rejects that approach by requiring safe, non-toxic options and ensuring that people who choose reusable products can sanitize them properly.

This issue also asks us to reflect on who we are as a society. How we treat people in our custody, especially when they are most vulnerable, reveals our values. Incarceration is a loss of liberty, not a sentence to unnecessary suffering or indignity. When the state controls every aspect of a person's daily life, it also carries responsibility for their basic health and wellbeing.

Providing menstrual products free of charge is a win for everyone. It protects health, reduces medical costs, lowers tension inside facilities, and creates safer environments for staff and incarcerated people alike. Most importantly, it affirms that human dignity does not disappear at the prison door.

We urge you to support this bill and choose care, responsibility, and basic human decency.