

PERIOD POVERTY IN ARKANSAS



PERIOD POVERTY IN ARKANSAS

- Period Poverty refers to the lack of access to menstruation education, hygiene facilities, or essential menstruation products like pads and tampons.
- For 1 in 3 low-income women, this means missing work, school, and outings because of a lack of period supplies.
- 79% of teenagers report wishing they have a more in-depth education about menstrual health.
- In Arkansas, 1 in 5 women and girls between the age of 12 and 44 lives below the federal poverty line.
<http://allianceforperiodsupplies.org>
- Women have to choose between buying food and period supplies.
- This impacts families, not just women. When women can't go to work or to school, everyone suffers.

PERIOD POVERTY IN ARKANSAS

- The stigma that shrouds periods further prevents individuals from talking about it. Period poverty, like other forms of poverty, can be debilitating. It can take different forms and has emotional, physical, and mental health effects on individuals. More than half of the world's population are menstruating people, it is high time period poverty becomes everybody's business.

PERIOD POVERTY IN ARKANSAS

“We need to start our girls at a younger age feeling good about themselves,” Rep. Denise Ennett says. “This is just one step out of many to help girls be empowered and not be embarrassed by their periods at school.”



PERIOD POVERTY IN ARKANSAS

ACT 566 of 2019

- The menstrual equity legislative movement in Arkansas began in 2019 when House Bill 1523 “Concerning The Treatment Of Female Inmates And Detainees In Correctional Or Detention Facilities; And Concerning Pregnant Inmates And Detainees” sponsored by Republican Representative Rebecca Patty and Republican Senator Cecile Bledsoe was introduced and passed to help ensure that women in correctional or detention facilities have access to period products at no cost.
- The bill had no opponents when voted on in both the House and Senate and was signed into law by Governor Asa Hutchinson to become Act 566.

PERIOD POVERTY IN ARKANSAS

A three-pronged approach:

1. Strengthen recent legislation (Act 933 of 2021) addressing access to feminine hygiene products in schools.*
2. Eliminate the sales tax on feminine hygiene products.*
3. Convene a Period Poverty Summit to coordinate efforts and help rally interested organizations and Arkansans.

*Adopted as a “Priority for a Better Arkansas 2022-2024” by the Arkansas Policy Panel Citizens First Congress

PERIOD POVERTY IN ARKANSAS

Strengthen recent legislation (Act 933 of 2021) addressing access to feminine hygiene products in schools

PERIOD POVERTY IN ARKANSAS

- Act 933 of 2021 was established “to allow public schools and open-enrollment public charter schools to use funding to provide feminine hygiene products at no charge in each public school and open-enrollment public charter school.”
- Democrat Representative Denise Ennett introduced it as a House Bill. The bill was co-sponsored by Independent Senator Jim Hendren and Republican Senator Missy Irvin. The bill had zero opponents in both the house and Senate.
- It does not make using funding for feminine hygiene products mandatory. It does ensure that under-stocked high schools and middle schools have the ability to provide adequate feminine products to students.

PERIOD POVERTY IN ARKANSAS

- Act 933 of 2021 needs to be strengthened. At minimum, it should include lower grades, not just middle and high schools. Also, activists would like to make it mandatory that schools in Arkansas provide period products at least as easy as they do bandaids.
- This legislation was originally in response to the lack of communication between administrators, counselors, nurses' offices, and students about where period products can be accessed at school.

PERIOD POVERTY IN ARKANSAS

- The lack of communication remains. Many schools are not aware of the legislation. Many school administrators continue to restrict access to period products and do not provide the information needed by students regarding access and other education.
- 4 of every 5 students surveyed by More Chances Period report that they do not currently see period supplies in their school bathrooms.
- Use of inappropriate materials (T-shirts, newspapers, rags) can cause infections, which make students miss even more days of class.
- This puts students missing class even further behind in school.

PERIOD POVERTY IN ARKANSAS

Eliminate the sales tax on feminine hygiene products

PERIOD POVERTY IN ARKANSAS

- Sales taxes on period supplies place an unequal burden on families with individuals who menstruate. In Arkansas, period products are taxed. We are currently charged an 8.625% tax on period products in Little Rock. About half of the states do not tax period supplies.
- In 2021, Republican Representative Aaron Pilkington introduced House Bill 1065 “to exempt feminine hygiene products from sales and use tax.” The bill was co-sponsored by Republican Senator Breanne Davis, Republican Representative Austin McCollum, Republican Representative Carlton Wing, Democrat Representative Denise Ennett, and Republican Senator Trent Garner. The bill died in the House Committee at Sine Die Adjournment.

PERIOD POVERTY IN ARKANSAS

- When a request was made to the AR Dept. of Finance and Administration to assess the impact of including period supplies as part of the tax-free school holiday, we were told that it would take “4 – 5 years” to identify the estimate of lost tax revenue in Arkansas.
- Period supplies are not covered in federal Food Stamp or Women, Infants and Children’s Supplemental Food program benefits.

PERIOD POVERTY IN ARKANSAS

- In 2023, we plan to ensure the re-introduction of the bill to exempt period products from sales and use tax.
- A definitive financial impact of removing the Arkansas taxes has not yet been established. One recent estimate is that generally states with taxes on period products would loose about \$1.5 million annually.

PERIOD POVERTY IN ARKANSAS

Convene a Period Poverty Summit to coordinate efforts and help rally interested organizations and Arkansans

PERIOD POVERTY IN ARKANSAS

- There are a number of organizations throughout the State attempting to address period poverty. They include: The Arkansas Period Poverty Project, More Chances Period, FemPAQ, Arkansas Women's Outreach, and Lotus Intervals.
- Also, many individuals, including teachers, school staff, volunteers and others are donating period supplies to schools, colleges, food pantries, and shelters.
- AAUW is working with the Arkansas Period Poverty Project, More Chances Period, femPAQ, and others to amplify their voices and support their activities in order to help address period poverty in Arkansas.

PERIOD POVERTY IN ARKANSAS

For more information about Period Poverty:

More Chances Period

<https://www.facebook.com/More-Chances-Period-104856834894460/>

Janai Taylor Harris morechancesperiod@gmail.com

Arkansas Period Poverty Project

<https://linktr.ee/ARPeriodProject?fbclid=IwAR2mzH4me0tuHZ19TYtNh9ZRuRs0DynY0IXUHeQqOOy6wL3g-KdOvl9TxzU>

periodlittlerock@gmail.com

PERIOD POVERTY IN ARKANSAS

For more information about AAUW:

National organization www.aauw.org

AAUW Arkansas

Website: <https://aauw-ar.aauw.net/>

Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/AAUWArkansas/>

Contact: Maria Jones arkansasaauw@gmail.com