



**Testimony for the House Judiciary Committee
February 15, 2018**

HB 797 - Correctional Services - Inmates - Menstrual Hygiene Products

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Support

The American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland (ACLU) supports HB 797, which requires all corrections facilities in the state of Maryland to provide menstrual hygiene products to inmates free of charge and in the quantities they need.

In the last 25 years, the number of women and girls caught in the criminal justice system has skyrocketed; many have been swept up in the war on drugs and subject to increasingly punitive sentencing policies for nonviolent offenses. Many of these women struggle with substance abuse, mental illness, and histories of physical and sexual abuse. Few get the services they need. The toll on women, girls, and their families is devastating.

Every day, in courtrooms, legislatures, and the public square, the ACLU fights to ensure that the criminal justice system treats women and girls fairly, protects the health and safety of women and girls in its custody, and facilitates their successful reentry into their communities.

Menstruation is a basic biological fact of everyday life for billions of women and girls across the planet. But for women behind bars, having your period can be a living nightmare. Prisons can make maintaining well-being and dignity a monthly struggle. That is what's happening in Maryland, where there have been reports that women receive inadequate menstrual hygiene products and supplies, at great risk to their health. It is a grim scene and hard to believe that women are still being denied basic health and sanitation in 21st century America.

HB 797 ensures that women in prison are afforded the basic menstrual health supplies they need. We can no longer consider women's menstrual needs a privilege and not a right, which can be taken away on a whim or used to coerce or humiliate women. Without measures such as HB 797, the degradation and abuse will continue in prisons, jails, and juvenile detention centers nationwide.

For these reasons, the ACLU of Maryland urges the Committee to favorably report HB 797.

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