

Proposed Sanitary Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Bill

Page 2: About you

Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation?

on behalf of an organisation

Which of the following best describes you? (If you are a professional or academic, but not in a subject relevant to the consultation, please choose "Member of the public".)

No Response

Please select the category which best describes your organisation

Third sector (charitable, campaigning, social enterprise, voluntary, non-profit)

Please choose one of the following; if you choose the first option, please provide your name or the name of your organisation as you wish it to be published.

I am content for this response to be attributed to me or my organisation

Please insert your name or the name of your organisation. If you choose the first option above, this should be the name as you wish it to be published. If you choose the second or third option, a name is still required, but it will not be published.

Children in Scotland

Please provide details of a way in which we can contact you if there are queries regarding your response. Email is preferred but you can also provide a postal address or phone number. We will not publish these details.

Page 7: Your views on the proposal

Q1. Which of the following best expresses your view of the proposed Bill?

Fully Supportive

Q1. Which of the following best expresses your view of the proposed Bill?

Please explain the reasons for your response

Children in Scotland is fully supportive of the proposed Bill for a number of reasons. Women and girls are financially disadvantaged because of their biology. Although many are able to cope with the financial costs associated with menstruation, it is a financial cost that is difficult to meet for those who live in poverty. A recent study by Plan International UK found that one in ten young women aged 14 to 21 living in the UK have been unable to afford sanitary products and one in five young women have changed to a less suitable sanitary product due to cost. As a consequence, many women and girls are forced to make health care decisions that leave them uncomfortable, ill at ease, self-conscious and unable to fully participate in their lives. We also acknowledge that stigma associated with menstruation still exists. This can mean girls are ill-equipped to deal with their periods when they start, or are ashamed or discouraged from talking about periods and sanitary products within families and school settings. For school-aged girls and young women, this may mean missing out on school and education on a regular basis. We believe this is a rights issue. Monica Lennon's proposed Bill upholds the rights of the child to health and education, as articulated under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Article 24 of the UNCRC – "You have the right to the best health possible and to medical care and information." Article 28 of the UNCRC – "You have the right to an education" We know that a lack of clean sanitary products can cause toxic shock syndrome. With this in mind, and for the points raised above, we support the Scottish Trades Union Congress' (STUC) call that access to feminine hygiene products is viewed as a health issue. Providing free sanitary products in schools will help to ensure that girls, young women and affected trans young people in Scotland do not miss out on education due to normal and predictable biological functions. Promoting health and wellbeing within the school environment the provision is clearly in line with the Getting it Right for Every Child approach. However we would raise an issue with the language of 'period poverty' that is used in the consultation and has become synonymous with the debate around sanitary products in Scotland. It is potentially stigmatising and also not in keeping with the universal approach of the Bill. We will outline our support for a universal approach below.

Page 8: Universal provision of sanitary products

Q2. Do you think a universal, card-based system (modelled on the c-card system for free condoms) would be an effective means of providing sanitary products for free to those who need them?

Yes

Please explain the reasons for your response

We believe the current costs associated with menstruation financially disadvantage all girls and women experiencing periods in society. A universal approach to free provision of sanitary products therefore will act as a small but significant step towards tackling the gender inequality that still exists in our country. This must be coupled with both appropriate health promotion information to support girls and young women to understand their menstrual cycle, and the inclusion of high quality PSE for both boys and girls on the topic. It is important that girls and women are given choice over the sanitary product chosen. Individuals will have very different needs and preferences in relation to the sanitary products used, and this should be respected.

Q3. Which of the following best expresses your view in relation to a card-based system?

Other (please specify)

Please explain the reasons for your response.

We are unsure about the merits of the card-based system suggested in the consultation document. We recognise that this approach may enable women and girls to obtain sufficient quantities of sanitary supplies, which will remove the need for them to rely on repeatedly 'restocking' in toilets for example. However, we are concerned that the C-card approach, unless widely used and supported, may become associated with poverty and therefore be stigmatising for some girls and young women, and ultimately deter use. We therefore recommend, regardless of the decision on the C-card approach, that sanitary products should be freely

Q3. Which of the following best expresses your view in relation to a card-based system?

available in all education, health, leisure and community settings where young people gather. This is particularly important for girls who are in the early stages of menstruation and may not have full understanding of their cycle yet. We also recommend meaningful engagement with all stakeholders in the development of the dispensary system. This should include girls, young women and trans young people who experience menstruation to identify what system would best meet their needs and how to make this inclusive and non-stigmatising.

Q4. Do you have a view on which locations would be most suitable for dispensing free sanitary products (e.g. GP surgeries, pharmacies, community centres, health clinics)?

Free sanitary products should be available in a variety of locations, including all of those mentioned above. Having a wide range of locations supports girls and young women to access sanitary products when and where suits them. This includes education, health, leisure and community settings.

Pharmacies, community centres and health centres could play a role in dispensing larger amounts of sanitary products, allowing girls and women to obtain adequate amounts to see them through each cycle. Not only is this convenient but it could also reduce stigma around periods and sanitary products.

The use of these settings would also support girls and young women to come into contact with other health promotion materials that may benefit them. Such a joined up approach is a small but important part of creating an integrated public health system that will improve Scotland's health longer term. However, the locations that best suit girls and women may differ greatly dependent on age. To ensure we meet the needs of all there needs to be meaningful engagement with all women, particularly girls, young women and trans young people to identify what locations would best suit their needs.

Page 11: Schools, colleges and universities

Q5. Do you agree that there should be specific obligations on schools, colleges and universities to make sanitary products available for free (via dispensers in toilets)?

Yes

Please explain the reasons for your response

Children in Scotland would be in favour of a statutory duty on schools, colleges and universities to make sanitary products available for free. As identified above we expect free provision of sanitary products to have a positive impact on girls and young women's education and so we see it as a key responsibility of these education authorities to create a supportive, inclusive education environment. Schools should be provided with increased funding to cover the additional cost of this expense. While we do not expect the costs to be particularly high due to the economy of scale involved in purchasing sanitary products in bulk, providing them should not impact on other areas of the school budget.

Page 12: Personal experience (questions 6 and 7 are for individual respondents only)

Q6. Have you ever struggled to access or afford sanitary products during menstruation? (e.g. financial barriers, unexpected circumstances, health issues)

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Not applicable: I do not need or use sanitary products

Q7. If sanitary products were available for free, which of the following would apply to you?

Not applicable: I do not need or use sanitary products

Page 14: Financial implications

Q8. Taking account of both costs and potential savings, what financial impact would you expect the proposed Bill to have on:

| | Significant increase in cost | Some increase in cost | Broadly cost-neutral | Some reduction in cost | Significant reduction in cost | Unsure |
|---|------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------|--------|
| (a) Government and the public sector (e.g. local authorities, the NHS) | | X | | | | |
| (b) Colleges and universities | | X | | | | |
| (c) Businesses (including suppliers/retailers of sanitary products) | | | | | | X |
| (d) Individuals (including consumers of sanitary products) | | | | | X | |

Please explain the reasons for your response

There will clearly be some increase in cost for the Government and public sector, however we do not expect the cost to be excessive. Providing sanitary products in schools will of course cost the Government and public sector money, however the benefits from providing sanitary products in schools make this an efficient spend in the long term. As identified above, we see the proposals as fitting in with a wider public health agenda. The proposals should support girls and young women to attend school more regularly with better health and wellbeing. We would recommend further research into the preventative spend of such measures.

Q9. Are there ways in which the Bill could achieve its aim more cost-effectively (e.g. by reducing costs or increasing savings)?

We feel the proposed measures are already cost-effective and will have a number of benefits that make their costs worthwhile. Children in Scotland also feel that choice of sanitary product should not be constrained in favour of cost reduction measures. Choice of product is an important part of the fulfillment of the rights of women and girls and also ensures that girls and young women can access a product that meets their needs.

Page 16: Equalities

Q10. What overall impact is the proposed Bill likely to have on equality, taking account of the following protected characteristics (under the Equality Act 2010): age, disability, gender re-assignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex, sexual orientation?

Positive

Please explain the reasons for your response

The Bill has the potential to have a variety of positive impacts on equality, most notably gender equality. However, steps must be taken to ensure that approaches to dispensing and the availability of sanitary products supports the specific needs of specific populations. For example, dispensing units need to be placed at heights and in locations that are accessible for disabled girls and young women. Locations will also be important for trans young people who menstruate, to ensure that access is not impeded by external perceptions of gender. We appreciate the recognition of this issue within the consultation document.

Q11. In what ways could any negative impact of the proposed Bill on equality be minimised or avoided?

We do not see any negative impacts of the Bill on equality.

Page 18: Sustainability

Q12. Do you consider that the proposed Bill can be delivered sustainably i.e. without having likely future disproportionate economic, social and/or environmental impacts?

Yes

Please explain the reasons for your response:

We feel the Bill would not have any disproportionate social or economic costs and in the long run could have benefits in both these areas. Our views on these have been clearly articulated throughout the response. There could be some concern about environmental impacts, due to wastage of sanitary products. We would recommend that guidance around environmentally-friendly disposal methods is reinforced to limit any negative environmental impact. The availability of free menstrual cups would also offer a more sustainable solution for those who wished it.

Page 19: General

Q13. Do you have any other comments or suggestions on the proposal?

The Scottish Government should put girls, young women and trans young people at the heart of discussions going forward. They are the key stakeholders and the experts. They will be able to give a far deeper understanding of the issues they face in this area. This would help break down the barriers and stigma in relation to menstruation and allow girls and young women to discuss the topic in their own way. We would support further youth-led research in this area, to focus on how this proposed Bill could be best implemented.