

Proposed Sanitary Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Bill

Page 2: About you

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

an individual

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".)

Student (at school, college or university)

Please select the category which best describes your organisation

No Response

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 If you choose the second or third option, a name is still required, but it will not be published.

My name is Stacy Atim Uma - 1. As a student of the University of Sheffield and a woman from a low-income background, who has been on Free School Meals and received the 16-18 Bursary, I am submitting evidence to the Scottish Parliament consultation on the Proposed Sanitary Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Bill.

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?

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Partially supportive

Please explain the reasons for your response

The Bill would be a massive step forward in eradicating 'period poverty' in Scotland. Scottish Government statistics depicted that in 2016, after housing costs, there were 1.05 million people in Scotland who are living in relative poverty. On average, a woman spends £492 a year on sanitary products. It is hard to imagine that women in poverty, who are already struggling to afford the necessities, would be able to afford £492 worth of sanitary products each year. Therefore, this Bill is vital as it releases the financial burden that 'period poverty' places on women and teenage girls by offering them free sanitary products. However, one major problem with the Bill is the element of a universal, card-based system to distribute the sanitary products. There will be a further examination of this in section 3.1, however it is important to acknowledge that a card system would over-complicate a service that has already been successfully reproduced by other parts of Scotland, without the use of a card. Furthermore, another significant issue with the Bill is its failure to specify who would be receiving the free-of-charge sanitary products. To limit the cost and to be more beneficial, this must be a service that is limited only to the people that need it the most: women and teenage girls from low-income backgrounds who cannot afford access to sanitary products.

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?

No

Please explain the reasons for your response

2.1 - I do not believe a universal, card-based system would be an effective means of providing sanitary products free-of-charge for those who need them. • 2.1.1 - The card system would have to consider whether there would be an age limit on who could possess the card and if so, would there be a need for parental consent for those under 16 as the average age for a woman starting her period is 12 years old. • 2.1.2 - Since the Bill is about making sure that sanitary products are free for women in need, this would mean that it would be for women who are from low-income backgrounds, in poverty or homeless. The use of a card would further stigmatise women who are trapped in poverty as similar to food vouchers, it would signify their poverty and could therefore be considered embarrassing to have. This would result in the opposite effect of what this Bill is about, which is making sure that more women from low-income backgrounds are able to access sanitary products free-of-charge. • 2.1.3 - Finally, this card would have to be designed to include not just women but men with a transsexual-history and non-binary people and this would be embarrassing for them also as they may not want to identify as menstruating. 2.2 – An alternative to a card-based system could be a data-based system. The Scottish Government collects data on all its citizens through a census, so the government could use the census information and send a letter to all low-income households informing them that they are eligible for free sanitary products monthly and directing them to the locations where they are able to receive the products. For women who are homeless, abused or household incomes have changed since the census, there would be forms available specified locations and online, where they would be able to sign-up to the Free Sanitary Product database.

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

There is no need for a card scheme

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)?

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4.1 - It is highly recommended that women must be able to access free sanitary products from health facilities, community centres and food banks throughout Scotland. Women, who are in need, must be able to access free sanitary products from places that can also provide them with advice and guidance. Whilst poverty is a major factor, controlling relationships and domestic violence could also be a reason and this Bill should not only be about giving away free sanitary products but also about finding ways to prevent long-term reliance on the provision.

4.2 - Furthermore, similar to in England, where young people are able to go to the sexual health clinic and gain condoms upon asking, sanitary products should be made available in a similar way to allow better accessibility and remove the stigma around 'period poverty'.

4.3 – Moreover, free sanitary products should be available online, with women being able to receive the products to their preferred address.

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

5.1 - The second part of the Bill offers that schools, colleges and universities should have a duty to make sanitary products available for free. Whilst I agree with this notion, I do not believe the law should force schools to introduce dispensers in toilets. It made sense for the New York City Council to vote for free-of-charge sanitary product dispensers in all public schools because 79% of students at public schools in New York are from low-income families – this is not the case for Scotland. The Scottish Government reported that in 2014-15, only 12% of children were living on low income after housing costs and suffering from material deprivation.

5.2 - A more effective recommendation would be that the duty is limited to schools and colleges, to begin and further consultation is considered with the Student's Unions of Scottish Universities 5.2.1 - Within schools and colleges, they would have either a designated person or a designated place where students, who are on Free School Meals or the Education Maintenance Allowance, could gain access to free sanitary products. This would significantly improve the impact of the Bill as by providing free sanitary products to only students who are on Free School Meals or in receipt of EMA, it would allow the Bill to help those who are from low-income families and truly in need.

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)

Yes, occasionally

Please explain or give an example of your experience if you feel able to do so.

As someone from a low-income family, I know the struggles of not being able to afford sanitary products - particularly at university where I have been in charge of my own finances. Luckily, Sheffield SU, although they do not offer free sanitary products - offers sanitary products for only £0.46, which is extremely cheap in comparison to retailers prices.

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

I would expect to claim free products occasionally

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:

No Response

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

9.1 - The Bill must make sure that it is split between the duty of schools and colleges funding their sanitary products and the universal system, which would be funded directly by the Scottish Government. This would enable a reduction in the direct costs towards the Scottish Government as it would be up to the schools and colleges to utilise their budgets to provide for their women in need.

9.2 - The universal system would be cost-effective if it followed a model, whereby it is limited to two types of sanitary products: tampons and sanitary towels, with women receiving the average number of sanitary products needed per month. By limiting the sanitary products available, this would reduce the direct costs to the Scottish Government.

9.3 – Finally, similar to the UK Government using the taxes from the tampon tax to fund women's charities, the Scottish Government could use their tampon tax proceeds to fund the provision of this Bill.

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

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

No Response

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?

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Yes

Page 19: General

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

13.1 - In conclusion, menstrual cycles are not a choice for women, therefore those who are struggling financially should not have to bare the financial burden of something that they cannot control. This Bill is incredibly important in being a catalyst for change and will depict Scotland as a trailblazer in women's rights and eradicating 'period poverty' in Scotland. Therefore, it is important that this Bill takes on the recommendations set out in this submission for it to be passed.