

# Addressing Period Poverty and Enhancing Student Life

## Supplemental Material

An Interactive Qualifying Project Report submitted to the Faculty of Worcester Polytechnic Institute  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Science.

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**WPI**

Worcester Community  
Project Center

Report Submitted to:

Sponsors, First Worcester District  
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# Abstract

Period poverty, the lack of access to menstrual products and hygienic facilities to use them, impacts 16.9 million menstruators in the United States and often forces people to choose between menstrual products and food (Michel et al., 2022). For our project, we developed recommendations to assist State Senator Robyn Kennedy in addressing the impacts of period poverty on students in Massachusetts. To accomplish this, we conducted 18 interviews with non-profit organizations, public school staff, and Massachusetts legislators. Additionally, we collected 22 survey responses from public school nursing staff and analyzed 26 pieces of legislation. We analyzed and compiled the data gathered through these methods into 10 key findings and 9 actionable recommendations for legislative and community efforts.

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## Authorship Page:

Chapter/Section	Primary Author	Primary Editors
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Informed Consent Preamble	Drafted by All	Edited by All
Executive Summary	Drafted by All	Edited by All
<b>Background</b>	-----	-----
Period Poverty	Tej Melekote	Simon Scott, Elijah Rothschild
Impacts of Period Poverty	Tej Melekote	Simon Scott
Barriers to Menstrual Hygiene Management	Patrick O'Brien	Tej Melekote, Simon Scott
Legislative Efforts	Tej Melekote	Patrick O'Brien, Simon Scott
Educational Efforts	Patrick O'Brien	Elijah Rothschild
Senator Robyn Kennedy	Elijah Rothschild	Patrick O'Brien, Tej Melekote
<b>Methodology</b>	-----	-----
I. Talking to NPOS	Tej Melekote	Edited by All
II. Interviewing Nurses and Staff at Schools	Patrick O'Brien	Tej Melekote, Elijah Rothschild
III. Communicate with Current Legislatures	Simon Scott	Tej Melekote
IV. Develop Recommendations	Elijah Rothschild	Tej Melekote
<b>Findings</b>	-----	-----
Challenges in Menstrual Education	Elijah Rothschild	Tej Melekote
Accessibility to Menstrual Equality	Patrick O'Brien, Simon Scott	Tej Melekote, Elijah Rothschild

Quality of Free Menstrual Products	Tej Melekote	Patrick O'Brien
<b>Recommendations</b>	-----	-----
Awareness and Education of Menstrual Equity	Elijah Rothschild	Tej Melekote
Sustainable and Accessible Solutions to Menstrual Equity	Patrick O'Brien	Tej Melekote, Elijah Rothschild
Legislative Research	Tej Melekote	Patrick O'Brien
Further Research	Tej Melekote	Simon Scott
<b>References</b>	-----	-----
<b>Appendices</b>	-----	-----

## **Appendix A: Informed Consent Preamble**

We are students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute in Massachusetts. And we are researching the impact of period poverty on academic success to aid Senator Kennedy's legislative efforts.

Your answers to this survey/interview will help us identify key issues and develop effective strategies to support students in Massachusetts.

Participation involves completing a short survey/ interview, which should take approximately 5 minutes to complete. Please be aware that this survey involves questions related to period poverty, which might evoke strong emotions or discomfort for some individuals.

Your responses will be anonymous. No personal identifiers will be collected. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any point.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact our faculty advisor Corey Dehner @cdehner@wpi. You can also contact our team @gr-c24periodpoverty@wpi.edu.

By proceeding with this survey/interview, you acknowledge that you have read and understood this consent form, and agree to participate in this research study.

## Appendix B: State Legislation Graph

A graph comparing the legislation for menstrual equity in different states throughout the United States.

State	Funding	Education Level	Product Locations
Alabama		Grades 5 - 12	Girl Bathrooms
Arkansas		Grades 6 - 12	Unspecified
Colorado		All in Low Income Areas	Unspecified
Connecticut		Grades 3 - 12	Girl + Gender Neutral Bathrooms + 1 Men Bathroom Per School
Delaware		Grades 4 - 12	Girl + Gender Neutral Bathrooms
Illinois		Grades 4 - 12	All
Nebraska		All	Unspecified
Nevada		Middle and High School	At 2 Girls Bathrooms
New Hampshire		Middle and High School	Girl + Gender Neutral Bathrooms
New York		Grades 6 - 12	Unspecified
Rhode Island		Grades 5 - 12	Girl + Gender Neutral Bathrooms
Texas		All	Girl Bathrooms
Virginia		All (only some locations Elementary)	Unspecified
Washington		Grades 6 - 12	Girl + Gender Neutral Bathrooms
Maine		Grades 6 - 12	All
Oregon		All	All
Maryland		Middle and High School	Girl Bathrooms
Montana		All	All
California		Grades 6 - 12	Girl + Gender Neutral Bathrooms + 1 Men Bathroom Per School
Georgia		Low Income Schools Only	Unspecified
Minnesota		Grades 4 - 12	Unspecified
New Jersey		Grades 6 - 12	Girl + Gender Neutral Bathrooms
New Mexico		Middle and High School	Girl + Gender Neutral Bathrooms + 1 Men Bathroom Per School

KEY:		
	Fully Funded	All
	Funding Delegated To Relevant Department	Most restrooms
	Partially Funded	Only Girl
	Unfunded	Few
		Unspecified

Ohio		Grades 6 - 12	Girl Bathrooms
Utah		All	Girl + Gender Neutral Bathrooms



## Appendix C: Interview Comparative Matrix

We used this matrix to organize which interviewees shared information on which of the obstacles to period equity.

	Inadequate Education	Language Barrier	Stigma	Period Packs + Toolkits	Product Placement	Dispensers	Low Quality Products	Unsustainable products	Legislation
Dr. Tsitsi, WPI Professor			✓						
Taylor Rich, Girls Inc.	✓								
Jennifer Gains, Alliance for Period Supplies			✓	✓					
Ceylan Rowe, Fihri				✓			✓	✓	
YWCA	✓	✓			✓				
Ellen Cynar, Unicorn						✓			
Meryl Glassman, Dignity Matters			✓						
Makkena, Holy Cross Student			✓						
Penelope Finnie, Pads on a Roll			✓						
Ann Linehan, Brockton Schools Nurse			✓						
Kenzie Blackwell, Teal Circle Project				✓					
Adriana Buduski, Wrap-Around Counselor at North High School			✓				✓		✓
Suzanne Herman/Period Law			✓				✓		
Nursing Director at Massachusetts	✓								
State Senator Patricia Jehlen									✓
Alisa of The Period Agenda						✓	✓		

	Additional extracurricular workshops	Reusable and biodegradable products	Approved purchase through the SNAP/EBT Act	Janitorial expense	Approval through legislation	Further research on economic impacts of period poverty	Social media and period tracker applications
Dr. Tsitsi, WPI Professor		✓					
Taylor Rich, Girls Inc.		✓	✓				✓

Jennifer Gains, Alliance for Period Supplies					✓		✓
Ceylan Rowe, Fihri		✓				✓	
YWCA		✓					
Ellen Cynar, Unicorn		✓		✓			
Meryl Glassman, Dignity Matters		✓			✓	✓	
Makkena, Holy Cross Student	✓						
Penelope Finnie, Pads on a Roll		✓		✓			
Ann Linehan, Brockton Schools Nurse					✓		
Kenzie Blackwell, Teal Circle Project					✓		
Adriana Buduski, Wrap-Around Counselor at North High School	✓						
Suzanne Herman/Period Law							
Nursing Director at Massachusetts							
State Senator Patricia Jehlen							
Alisa of The Period Agenda		✓					

## Appendix D: Comparative Data Matrix about different approaches and who elaborated about each idea

Interviewee	Approach to tackling period poverty?	Cost	How quickly could it be implemented within an area	The barriers associated with the approach	Target Audience	On Raising Awareness	Project Distribution	Type of approach (educational/ legislative)?
Tsitsi M	Menstrual disk	\$40/unit	Simply, units are already pre packaged and can be sold in retail, still in testing	Steep price for a single unit, most would be unaware of product from the start	Any woman who has periods. Available and fits for every woman, instructions given in box	Believes raising awareness is the most key factor in implementation of this plan. She believes celebrity endorsement would be able to achieve this.	Testing the distribution by giving these to WPI students to test.	Business/Distribution
	Celebrity endorsement	Varies upon who is asked	Very fast due to connections via social media	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Taylor (Girls Inc)	Period Packs	3 Packs of Pads are included in each of the packs. She doesn't know the exact cost	It can be implanted rather easily as these products are available in an easy to access areas	The main barrier to this approach is getting the word out. More use of social media is needed to help implement this	School girls and menstruators of the Worcester community. Both young girls and Worcester community members	She believes all people including those who do and don't menstruate should be educated. She believes those in power should conduct focus groups with community members to understand the issues that community members face and how to properly address these	A stand with many bags of period supplies, placed right by the entrance of the building, so one can just grab one without any of the stigma associated with it	This is an educational / distributional approach
	Stipends	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Patricia and others (YWCA)	Health clinics in school	Salaries of "rap-around", social worker salaries. Assumed costly	XX	Costs of implementation and stigma against mental health	Students			Education / mental health

splitting budget between schools	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
period trackers/apps	Lower cost, will require a decent amount of time	Very easily, just needs publicity	Confusion with implementation, people thinking it is not better than others	Mainly for people within the school age group, but can be used for any menstruation	N/A	Easily accessible, will be given through a free download for anyone who needs it	Education	
wrap around coordinator	Decent amount of payment, will require a set amount of wage	Depends on how and when we find workers	Niche field of work, kids and other in school might not find them trustworthy at first	Within school environments, maybe other community centers	N/A	N/A	Educational/Built through trust	
period kits	Tampons, pads, wipes, and scrunchies are provided. The cost will be the cost of these products.	N/A	The issue is distribution and getting the word out on these products.	Mainly community members	Raising awareness is needed to help make an impact with supplying these products	Products are distributed at YWCA for community members exclusively. If this is adapted, it could be adapted to help the community at large.	Distribution	
language access	undetermined cost	Improving language access could be implemented quickly. This would involve having a variety of languages available to help show the use of different	Costs with the installation and implementation of new approaches	The illiterate and non-english speakers	N/A	The distribution of products with better instructions for non-english speakers could be implemented	educational	

			products. Additionally, non-word signage can be used.					
Jennifer Gaines (Alliance for Period Supplies)	Period Poverty Toolkit	Almost nothing, maybe 20 hours	instantly, each toolkit is digital. APS mastered connecting with their community.	getting new people involved, this approach believes in spreading awareness, the time spent will be connecting with their community	anyone can benefit from the toolkit	Each toolkit provides any knowledge you want.	N/A	educational
	Webinar	Not much money, but a lot of publicity required	Quickly, due to the nature of online invitations and accessibility	Lack of information, hard to get a word across, might not have all available people to communicate	People and organizations working within the field of period poverty and other health concerns	N/A	N/A	educational
	Publicizing (social media)	Somewhat costly, requires a few different products from retail dispensers	Quickly, many available centers that could access the product	Costly, requires a constant influx of available products, potential stealing	Any menstruator within a arms reach of a connection center	N/A	Given through the same way that other kits work, come physically into center, potentially online	Distributional/Financial
Ceylan Rowe (Fihri)	information through numbers (looking at period poverty as an industry) to convince legislators	Some time and money, mostly time (like years)	Very long...too long	Funding mostly, need to convince people that this is an issue to research	Hopefully will provide universal solution, so target audience is everyone	If the research creates an impact for people to make change, will definitely raise awareness and reduce stigma	No distribution for a while	educational
	providing multiple options	very expensive: time,	quite slow, requires research and	lots of barriers, need multiple companies to	everybody!	Reduces lots of stigma. This approach shows that legislators care, which	Just like cost, need to coordinate with	Both

		money, and effort	implementation requires coordinating with multiple companies	agree		would reduce stigma	multiple NPOs/Companies	
The Period Agenda	Flyers and Posters for education	Costs assumed to be very little	N/A	Needs approval from the Dean. A lot of opposition from people taking down the posters	Students	This raises awareness	Distributed in all bathrooms and posters across campus	educational
	Period baskets and dispensers	Costs of the products	N/A	N/A	Students	N/A	Distributed in all women's bathrooms. More work needs to be done in gender neutral and mens bathrooms	distribution
Unicorn	Consider menstrual products as toilet paper	not that much money	pretty quickly if legislation, have to make recommendation specific	not that many barriers, need to convince legislators. Quality of product could be lacking	Anyone using a bathroom	Yes, this shows that menstrual products are as important as toilet paper	Same distribution, just filling out forms differently	legislative
	plastic dispensers	pretty cheap	very quick, unless we need to remove previous dispensers	Lacking the education aspect	Students	not really	pretty easy	legislative
	Janitorial Expense	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Dignity Matters / Meryl Glassman	Supporting non profits(legislational)	assumed to be costly	N/A	N/A	Menstrators	Raises awareness and supplies products to organizations in need	Helps supply other non profits with period products and make sure that they are sustainable	Disruptional
	Aid in specified product	assumed to be costly	Quickly	N/A	Menstrators	N/A	Having a surplus of products to supply to meet	Disruptional

	demand						the need of menstruators	
Makenna	workshops	assumed to be costly, need space and people to volunteer	Would take a group consensus, and most people in an area might be reluctant	People who are told about help would be reluctant at first, requires a lump start sum that we might have	Women within the community that this is given to	Gives insight on the issue to more people who are unaware	N/A	Educational

## Appendix E: Nurse / Wrap Around Coordinator Interview Questions

- How aware are the [SCHOOL DISTRICT NURSES / COUNSELORS] of period poverty among students?
- Have there been any studies or surveys conducted within [SCHOOL DISTRICT] to assess the extent of period poverty and its impact on students' academic performance and attendance?
- Can you share any specific instances or observations that highlight the impact of period poverty on students in [SCHOOL DISTRICT]?
- Are there resources available for students experiencing period poverty, such as free menstrual products in schools? How is information about these resources communicated to students?
- What educational efforts are in place to inform students about menstrual health and hygiene?
- What are the primary challenges [SCHOOL DISTRICT] faces in addressing period poverty?
- Are there any barriers, such as budget constraints or societal stigmas, that hinder the implementation of effective measures?
- What future initiatives or improvements are being considered by [SCHOOL DISTRICT] to better address period poverty?
- Based on your experience, what recommendations would you give to policymakers to effectively combat period poverty in schools?
- What kind of support or changes at the state legislative level would be most beneficial for [SCHOOL DISTRICT] in addressing period poverty?
- Are there any other experts, organizations, or resources you would recommend we connect with for further insights or collaboration?



## **Appendix F: Non-Profit Interview Questions**

- How has your personal journey and experiences shaped your organization's mission to provide sustainable period products to those in need?
- What methods do you consider to be the most impactful towards tackling period poverty?
- How do you balance the need for sustainable period products with accessibility and affordability?
- What are the main challenges you've encountered in ensuring access to period products for menstruators, particularly in the context of education?
- What key lessons or insights from your work could be valuable for policymakers working on period poverty?
- Are there any other experts, organizations, or resources you would recommend we connect with for further insights or collaboration?

## Appendix G: State Legislator Interview Questions

- What steps and strategies do you take to navigate the legislative process for important bills like the I AM BILL?
- Could you kindly share insights on the funding supporting the I AM BILL?
- We're eager to learn about the strategy for distributing menstrual products under the I AM BILL? Are there specific partnerships or logistics plans?
- Where specifically will menstrual products be available in schools, prisons, and shelters?
- Given the importance of menstrual product access for younger students, is there a plan to extend the I AM BILL to include grades below 6th grade?
- What are the specific types of menstrual products included under the I AM BILL?
- What kind of support is needed to advocate for sustainable or reusable menstrual products in future bills?
- Could you share your insights on the potential challenges in implementing period poverty-related legislation and the strategies you typically use to address these issues?
- Lastly, we'd appreciate your insights on how the current political polarization influences the passing of bills, particularly those related to social issues like period poverty.