

From the Desk of
Rep. Margaret Doherty

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ACLU of Oregon¹ Urges a Yes Vote on HB 2515 Access to Feminine Hygiene Products at Correctional Facilities

HB 2515, which would ensure access to feminine hygiene products at no cost for incarcerated people² in Oregon' state, local, adult and youth correctional facilities. This is an important issue of gender equity and basic human dignity.

We have heard numerous reports—from inside and outside Oregon—about incarcerated women being denied a sufficient supply, both in number and type, of menstrual products. For many incarcerated women it can be difficult or impossible to come up with enough money to pay for the products they need at commissaries, which in many cases charge significantly more for menstrual products than local grocery stores and pharmacies. In some cases, incarcerated women have reported that correctional officers have withheld products as a means of punishment or control.

When people cannot adequately manage their periods to prevent bleeding onto clothing or other items, it can be humiliating, denying people basic human dignity and decency. Inadequate access can also lead to dangerous infections and toxic shock syndrome. Embarrassment about bleeding through clothing can also cause reluctance to participate in programs or refusal of visits from family and legal counsel.

Access to feminine hygiene products in prisons and jails is an issue that has emerged as part of a larger conversation about women in prison, who have been the largest increasing population of the criminal justice system for two decades. In 2016, New York became the first city to require free tampons and sanitary pads in correctional facilities. Since then, there has been a wave of policy changes by correctional institutions and similar bills introduced—and in numerous cases passed—by state legislatures across the country. Oregon should follow suit and take this important step toward ensuring that the health and dignity of Oregonians are not sacrificed at the prison door.

The ACLU of Oregon urges you to support HB 2515.

¹ The ACLU of Oregon is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to preservation of civil liberties and civil rights, with more than 45,000 members and supporters statewide.

² Note that while this is primarily a women's issue, some individuals with non-female gender identities also menstruate and need access to menstrual products.