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HB 3294 – Relating to feminine hygiene products in public schools (referred to as The Menstrual Dignity Act)

The Centennial School District straddles the border of Portland and Gresham as well as Clackamas and Multnomah Counties. We serve nearly six thousand students from varying backgrounds. Sixty-eight percent of our students qualify for the free lunch program. Parts of our district are urban and many of our families live at or below the poverty line, lacking the ability to provide many basic needs including menstrual hygiene products. The lack of these products interferes with attendance, particularly in our lower-income communities and disproportionately impacts students of color. For this reason, the Centennial School District Board of Directors strongly supports the passage of HB 3294 which would bring menstrual products to all public schools ending period poverty and ensuring dignity for menstruating students in Oregon.

Menstruation has long-been stigmatized even though more than half of the population menstruates for up to four decades. This stigmatization has been normalized by gender-based humor, separation, and omission.

A middle school student shared an example of this issue with the adults in her world. She explained that due to school discipline issues, some schools did not allow students to carry a bag or purse unless it was clear; forcing menstruating students to carry feminine hygiene products down the halls openly, where some kids were taunting, cruel and harassing. Some of her classmates were also missing school because they were out of tampons, pads, could not afford them, and public assistance programs (food stamps) would not pay for them.

This stigma and a lack of financial resources creates inequalities in educational access for some of the Centennial School District's menstruating students. All hygienic needs of boys are routinely met, including toilet paper, soap, running water, paper towels and bandages if needed. We recognize the inequity in our school system and wish to rectify it.

All young people are entitled to a free public education that is equitable in access and quality of content. Menstrual equity is a basic equity issue.

The Centennial School District Board of Directors is excited to see this “unseen” inequity challenged by Oregon House Bill 3294 - referred to as The Menstrual Dignity Act and we strongly support passage of this critical Bill.