

# TRANSFORMING MENSTRUAL EQUITY IN HAWAII' I PUBLIC SCHOOLS

BY MEGAN BOBILIN

*[SB966 – a new senate bill for menstrual equity – would establish the first statewide policy to provide free menstrual products for all Hawai'i students on public secondary school campuses.]*

[O'ahu, Hawai'i, February 8, 2021] - In the midst of a statewide economic crisis – with roughly 60% of Hawai'i's local families either unemployed or struggling to meet basic needs – a new senate bill, SB966 could provide immense relief to local families.

“This bill is a huge step in the direction of normalizing menstruation in public schools,” said Nikki-Ann Yee, Co-Founder of Ma'i Movement Hawai'i, a newly established advocacy-based organization with a mission to end period poverty – the inability to access sanitary products and menstruation education due to financial constraints.

Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, nearly 50% of Hawai'i DOE students were “economically disadvantaged,” and now because of increased financial hardships, over 20% of local Hawai'i families are listed below the federal poverty line.

“When you can't find menstrual products at home, then you more than likely are just not going to go to school at all,” said Yee. “Students have to make the choice of skipping classes or missing entire days of school each month” – all to avoid the public humiliation of lacking a basic hygiene product, due to financial constraints beyond their control.

A vicious cycle of oppression is continued when young female, transgender, and non-binary students are prevented from being fully engaged in school. SB966 will reduce the trend of gender and economic-based inequity by eliminating this barrier that consistently prevents financially-disadvantaged students from achieving equal academic success.

SB966 will not only allow students to focus on learning, it will put a stop to a major public health issue and reduce the cultural shame that permeates the conversation around healthy menstrual management. “Not only are you providing this basic need for a normal bodily function, you are saying there's nothing to be ashamed about,” said Yee.

If passed, this will be the first and only statewide policy to ensure period products to all Hawai'i public secondary school students. Last year, a similar bill was introduced by Representative Amy Perruso, with instrumental advocacy work from DOE teachers, Moana Olaso and Sarah Milianta-Laffin, before being shut down when the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

“When menstrual products are kept out in public – when they're not hidden like they're dirty or bad – it changes the stigma in society,” said Sarah Milianta-Laffin, current teacher at 'Ilima Intermediate School.

“This should have happened a long time ago. It is time that we make this a priority,” said Moana Olaso, Affiliate Director of I Support the Girls Hawai'i and former DOE teacher of over 13 years.

With the reopening of the legislature, we have another chance to make real change happen. SB966 has just recently been referred to the Senate Committee of Education, under the direction of Committee Chair Michelle Kidani. To help request a hearing please contact Senator Kidani at 586-7100 or [senkidani@capitol.hawaii.gov](mailto:senkidani@capitol.hawaii.gov) by Friday, February 12th.

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