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STATE OF HAWAI‘I
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
HAWAI‘I STATE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

NEWS RELEASE

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Media Contact: Laney Trinh
Office: (808) 586-5757
E-mail: ctrinh@dhs.hawaii.gov

NEW REPORT ON MENSTRUATION SHEDS LIGHT ON PERIOD POVERTY IN HAWAI‘I

Honolulu, HI— Today, the Hawai‘i State Commission on the Status of Women and Ma‘i Movement Hawai‘i released the first government report on menstruation in Hawai‘i after the recent statewide pilot in local public schools revealed that the Department of Education students in Hawai‘i use unhealthy alternatives like newspapers, old rags, baby diapers and leaves when they did not have access to menstrual products.

Understanding Period Poverty in Hawai‘i: A Community Survey Analysis analyzed answers from 361 women, girls, gender non-conforming people, and māhū surveyed across the state about their experiences with menstruation. Period poverty is shorthand for systematic lack of access to period supplies, such as pads and tampons. Nearly one in four people (23.8%) reported that they have made sacrifices or gone with less in order to afford period products in Hawai‘i.

The research project was initiated by Ma‘i Movement Hawai‘i, a local non-profit dedicated to ending period poverty.

Half of the study participants reported missing school or work because of their period, and 42% have had to miss class or leave school early because they did not have period products. Less than half of respondents (42.3%) said their school provided period products and, when the school did, it was not necessarily for free. There is also no paid menstrual leave in Hawai‘i.

The study also found that menstruation remains taboo in Hawai‘i. Nearly half of the study participants surveyed (48.3%) received little to no information about menstruation before it started. Embarrassment about menstruation was cited as one of the top three barriers to obtaining period products. More than one in five respondents are embarrassed to talk about their period.

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“This report is a wakeup call that the jokes, silence, and disgust around menstruation are holding back gender equality in Hawai‘i. In 2021, menstruation shouldn’t be associated with filth, shame, or financial distress. The government should be the party responsible for ensuring girls, women and gender diverse people can equally participate in school and work. We should not be hearing from teenagers that teachers make them feel ashamed of their periods. Girls should not be using newspapers and leaves to stand-in for products that are actually medical supplies,” said Khara Jabola-Carolus, Executive Director of the Commission.

Nikki-Ann Yee, co-founder of Ma‘i Movement Hawai‘i said, “Period poverty is not just about understanding the socioeconomic injustice of menstruation, but about exposing the layers of structural injustice that keep girls, women and gender non-conforming people from living full and productive lives. There is no other bodily function that renders people helpless, voiceless and conditioned to believe it is something to be ashamed of and oppressed. Yet, our report reveals how the cycle of shame and stigma perpetuates period poverty.”

The report urges remedial steps by the Hawai‘i Department of Education to make menstrual products available free and accessible to all students, establish policies for excused absences related to menstruation, and implementation of comprehensive sexuality education.

“After speaking to a handful of schools, it seems there is also no consistent policy in schools for excusing students from missing school or leaving early because of their periods, which could be for any number of reasons like inadequate access to products, period pain or menstrual disorders and bleeding through their clothes during the school day”, added Nikki-Ann Yee.

Brandy-Lee Yee, sister of Nikki-Ann, and co-founder of Ma‘i Movement Hawai‘i stated, "the report is groundbreaking because it shows us the gaps in care and equity for half the population in Hawai‘i and will serve as a roadmap so we and society can better support everyone who menstruates in our lāhui."

The full report can be found [here](#).

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