

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON WOMEN'S ISSUES

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June 2, 2016  
Start: 10:15 a.m.  
Recess: 12:20 p.m.

HELD AT: Council Chambers - City Hall

B E F O R E:  
LAURIE A. CUMBO  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:  
Darlene Mealy  
Elizabeth S. Crowley  
Karen Koslowitz  
Ben Kallos  
Julissa Ferreras-Copeland  
Helen K. Rosenthal

## A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Azadeh Khalili  
Executive Director  
NYC Commission on Gender Equity

Michelle Clifford  
Warden  
Rose M. Singer Center

Teniqua Kornegay  
NYC Department of Homeless Services

Grace Meng  
Congresswoman

Linea Mitchell  
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Brooklyn Tech

Jo Haines  
Executive Director  
PowerPlay NYC

Jennifer Weiss-Wolf  
Lawyer  
Brennan Center for Justice  
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Judith Arroyo  
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## A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

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## A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

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1  
2 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Good morning. Good  
3 morning, my name is Laurie Cumbo and I am Chair of  
4 the Committee on Women's Issues and we are now going  
5 to begin this hearing.

6 [gavel]

7 As chair of the Women's Issues Committee  
8 today, I really want to take a moment to be a bit  
9 unorthodox right now. Today we're wearing orange;  
10 this is the month of Anti-Gun Violence Awareness  
11 Month and all throughout this month we will be  
12 recognizing our desire to decrease shootings  
13 throughout New York City to zero and we're doing so  
14 by highlighting it this month. I also want to --  
15 last night, as chair of the Women's Issues Committee,  
16 I was in Council Member Jumaane Williams' district  
17 where we were at a candlelight vigil for a young  
18 woman, 16 years old, who was shot and killed two days  
19 ago. We want to at this moment take a moment of  
20 silence for this young lady, 16 years old, gone far  
21 too soon in her life, a junior at Edward R. Morrow  
22 High School. [pause] Thank you.

23 Shemel Mercurius was a beautiful young  
24 lady and we have to recognize that all lives matter,  
25

1 particularly our young girls, who are so sacred in  
2 our community.

3  
4 Good morning. I am Council Member Laurie  
5 Cumbo; this hearing of the Committee on Women's  
6 Issues is now called to order.

7 I'd like to thank you all for coming  
8 today; I'd like to especially thank Speaker Melissa  
9 Mark-Viverito and Council Member Ferreras-Copeland  
10 for their steadfast leadership and collaboration on  
11 this issue. This is what happens when dynamic women  
12 come together; we can really change the dynamics of  
13 women all throughout the city and the nation.

14 I'd like to thank the members of the  
15 Committee on Women's Issues that are present. I also  
16 want to recognize the staff on the Committee on  
17 Women's Issues, Counsel Aminta Kilawan and Policy  
18 Analyst Joan Povolny for their work and preparing for  
19 today's hearing.

20 For far too long menstruation has been  
21 treated as taboo to talk about; for too long girls  
22 and women have been taught that maybe something is  
23 wrong with them while menstruating or that they're  
24 going through the change. Today we are taking a step  
25 towards removing some of these stigmas and treating

1  
2 menstruation as what it is, a natural body function  
3 that girls and women go through, period.

4           Menstrual products are a vital component  
5 for the health, wellbeing and full participation of  
6 women and girls in all aspects of society. It has  
7 been reported that a lack of access to such products  
8 can cause emotional duress and even physical  
9 infection and disease.

10           In addition to the societal stigmas  
11 attached to menstruation, there are some very real  
12 burdens placed on those needed menstrual products.  
13 For one thing, these products are very expensive and  
14 they also are unfairly taxed as luxury items, if you  
15 can believe that. Menstrual products are a basic  
16 health necessity; not a luxury item. This practice  
17 will hopefully end very soon in New York State if  
18 Governor Cuomo signs the recently passed legislation  
19 to end the State tax on these items.

20           Access to menstrual products has proven  
21 to be limited for vulnerable populations. Currently  
22 the cost of these products are not included in health  
23 insurance and flexible spending accounts, nor in  
24 public benefit programs such as the Supplemental  
25 Nutrition Assistance Program, also known as SNAP, or

1  
2 Women, Infants and Children (WIC) benefits. Many  
3 shelters and homeless shelters in New York City  
4 distribute these items to their female residents  
5 along with toothpaste and shampoo; however, social  
6 workers indicate that they are often harder to source  
7 from public donors.

8           Additionally, it has been reported that  
9 access to menstrual products in the New York City  
10 prison system is also limited. According to  
11 anecdotal accounts gathered by the Women in Prison  
12 Project, some women were reduced to using one pad for  
13 the whole cycle, with some claiming that they were  
14 asked to prove that they had soiled pads before they  
15 were given new ones, which is humiliating and an  
16 attack on basic human dignity.

17           And we've all heard stories or have had  
18 our own experiences in school when we have been in  
19 the situation where we need menstrual products and  
20 maybe just don't happen to have any with us.  
21 Currently in most schools you need to go through the  
22 nurse or worse, go home. Middle and high school is  
23 stressful enough; let's do what we can to make it  
24 less so for our youth. Feminine hygiene products  
25

1  
2 should be seen in the same way as toilet paper is for  
3 everyone; everyone should have access to them.

4           The bills being heard today seek to  
5 address those inequalities and barriers and I look  
6 forward to hearing from all of you about how to make  
7 some progress for young women.

8           I wanna thank you again for coming; I'm  
9 so proud to be chair of the Women's Issues Committee;  
10 I am extraordinarily proud to work and to serve with  
11 Council Member Ferreras-Copeland and Speaker Melissa  
12 Mark-Viverito, because we are all about equality and  
13 from pay equity all the way to making sure that our  
14 health, our feminine health products are affordable  
15 and accessible to all; we are countering inequalities  
16 wherever exist. So I'm proud to serve today and I'm  
17 proud to turn it over to my colleague, Council Member  
18 Ferreras-Copeland. Thank you.

19           COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS-COPELAND: Thank  
20 you, Chair; it is an honor to be here today. Good  
21 morning; I am Council Member Julissa Ferreras-  
22 Copeland.

23           First I wanna thank Chair Laurie Cumbo  
24 for having this hearing; I would also like to thank  
25 Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito for her leadership in

1 reforming our criminal justice system, and for  
2 including in that justice for inmates during  
3 menstruation; her partnership in this issue and this  
4 package has been tremendous.  
5

6 We are in the height of our budget  
7 season, where I usually must spend my waking hours  
8 negotiating on an \$82.2 billion budget. I know many  
9 of you are nervous because I'm here and not  
10 downstairs, but I'll be coming in and out. However,  
11 I am glad that this package of legislation is being  
12 heard today, today because it's important; it was  
13 important yesterday; it was important a month ago,  
14 but today is the day where we are able to do this.

15 I will be coming in and out, as I  
16 mentioned earlier, of the hearing because we're  
17 negotiating downstairs and making sure that we have  
18 all of our resources and I saw your hands up.

19 Traditionally women and girls -- in the  
20 case of the LGBT community, men too -- have been  
21 subject to unnecessary inconvenience and shamed by  
22 society's perception of menstrual hygiene. This sign  
23 or reproductive health and the ability to create life  
24 became a stigma, something that people hid,  
25 oftentimes to their detriment. Only a year ago I

1 held -- almost to date; it was actually June 10th --  
2 we held a roundtable with a number of advocates and  
3 women, many of whom are here today. The stories I  
4 heard that day they exposed to me, something that had  
5 been hiding in plain sight, the fact that until very  
6 recently menstrual hygiene was an after thought in  
7 our workplace and schools, in our relationships and  
8 in our policy. From school to the State Tax Code,  
9 for every woman and girl, access to these products  
10 was routinely and systematically blocked. If you had  
11 your period and did not have a tampon, you needed to  
12 go to the nurse as if you were sick or you had to pay  
13 more because pads and tampons are characterized  
14 alongside cosmetic items; non-essentials are taxed  
15 accordingly.  
16

17 Growing up I confronted this issue, just  
18 as every woman, and I have talked to so many women  
19 and girls who are confronted today. It is wrong and  
20 we are here to rectify it today for New Yorkers and  
21 hopefully across this country and the world. Today  
22 there is a growing movement to mainstream access to  
23 menstrual hygiene products and New York is poised to  
24 be at the forefront again, thanks to the leaders like  
25 Congresswoman Grace Meng, who introduced legislation

1  
2 that would make menstrual hygiene products more  
3 accessible and affordable to women by adding it to  
4 the list of items that can be purchased with funds in  
5 flex spending accounts; in Washington, to take our  
6 cause nationally, Assembly Member Linda Rosenthal and  
7 State Senator Sue Serino, who together moved a  
8 bipartisan bill to end the ridiculous tax on tampons  
9 to the Governor's desk; awaiting a signature.

10           Thanks to my colleagues here at the City  
11 Council -- and I just wanted to say she's joining us  
12 here -- but Karen Koslowitz actually introduced a  
13 similar bill in the 90s and it didn't go anywhere  
14 from this floor. So you know, it is amazing that we  
15 had visionaries in the 90s; it's unfortunate that  
16 it's taken till 2016, but I just wanted to publicly  
17 thank you for your vision and your leadership and the  
18 fact that she's here gives me goosebumps, so we can  
19 do this together -- [background comment] yes -- for  
20 showing how municipalities and New York City can go  
21 above and beyond and provide women and girls with  
22 what we need in shelters, jails and public schools.

23           While much of the debate on this issue  
24 has centered around taxation, we at the city level  
25 can take it a step beyond to guarantee access to

1  
2 everyone; regardless of whether you can afford these  
3 or not, Int. 1122, 1123 and 1124 ensure that  
4 menstrual hygiene products are easily accessible,  
5 provided free of charge and free of humiliation  
6 because of the lack of access to menstrual hygiene  
7 products by ensuring access to menstrual products  
8 upon request. This current lack of access has been  
9 known to cause emotional hardship, infection and in  
10 some cases diseases, such as cervical cancer. Even  
11 though correctional facilities have a limited supply  
12 of these products and many homeless centers receive  
13 them through private donations, coverage remains  
14 unsatisfactory and unreliable. Female inmates who  
15 are guaranteed a baseline living standard and  
16 homeless women who are among New York's most  
17 vulnerable population deserve better attention to  
18 their health needs.

19 In addition, Res. 1012-A would affirm the  
20 Council's support for State legislation that exempts  
21 feminine hygiene products from all State and local  
22 sales tax, just like all other products consumed by  
23 humans for the preservation of health.

24 These bills do not just alleviate  
25 physical burden; their wider objective is to promote

1  
2 equality and important institutions for our society;  
3 after all, tampons and pads are not luxury products  
4 and we've said this and we all know this; they are  
5 necessary items in addressing a familiar and natural  
6 biological process; increasing access to menstrual  
7 hygiene products in our schools, shelters and prisons  
8 is just one step forward in eliminating the taboo and  
9 stigma surrounding women's health in our society;  
10 this is a growing movement, represented by many here  
11 today, that is changing access to these products  
12 across the world. I am proud to be a part of this;  
13 today we stand by other policymakers and advocates in  
14 Wisconsin, Ohio, California, and elsewhere.

15 I'd like to thank again the Women's  
16 Issues Chair, Laurie Cumbo for bringing this package  
17 to a hearing today and all 26 Council Members who  
18 have signed on to this legislation.

19 I wanna thank Matthew Golub, as well as  
20 Aminta Kilawan and Joan Povolny in the Council's  
21 legislative staff for their work on these bills and I  
22 look forward to hearing testimony and discussing  
23 these proposals today.

24 Again, to all the advocates who have  
25 stood with me and The Speaker and today with our

1  
2 Chair, we are so proud of this day and I'd like to  
3 note; I wish I could stay here every minute, but know  
4 that I'm handling other business equally as important  
5 so that we can pay for all this stuff. Okay, Chair.

6 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Thank you so much and  
7 this is why we need more women in leadership. I'm so  
8 proud to be joined here today with Council Members  
9 Karen Koslowitz from Queens and Council Member  
10 Darlene Mealy from Brooklyn, and while I'm chairing  
11 today's committee, I hope you will represent me well  
12 in the Brooklyn Delegation. [background comments]

13 So at this time we are gonna call our  
14 first panel; we have Azadeh Khalili, who is the  
15 Commissioner on Gender Equity from the Mayor's  
16 Office; we also have Warden Clifford, New York City  
17 Department of Corrections; we have Oleosay Jumansak.  
18 Did I do that anywhere near close? Shook [sic].  
19 Okay. And we also have Judith Arroyo, President of  
20 Local... [background comments] I'm sorry? Okay, so we  
21 don't have her. Alright. [background comments] And  
22 we have Teniqua Kornegay. Alright. So we are going  
23 to swear you in and then we'll begin to hear your  
24 testimony. Thank you.

1  
2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Will you all please  
3 raise your right hands? Do you affirm to tell the  
4 truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth in  
5 your testimony before this committee and to respond  
6 honestly to council member questions? Okay, thank  
7 you.

8 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Thank you; you may  
9 begin.

10 AZADEH KHALILI: Thank you very much,  
11 Council Member.

12 Good morning Chairperson Laurie Cumbo and  
13 distinguished members of the Committee on Women's  
14 Issues.

15 My name is Azadeh Khalili and I was  
16 appointed by Mayor de Blasio as the founding  
17 Executive Director of the New York City Commission on  
18 Gender Equity. I am joined today by colleagues from  
19 the Department of Education, the Department of Social  
20 Services and the Department of Corrections. It is a  
21 great pleasure to appear before the committee to talk  
22 about this critically important topic.

23 I am pleased to report that the de Blasio  
24 Administration and First Lady Chirlane McCray have  
25 made an unprecedented commitment to New York City's

1 women and girls. Let me begin by stating that the  
2 administration strongly supports the City Council's  
3 effort to expand access to feminine hygiene products  
4 for all New Yorkers, everyone should have access to  
5 basic hygiene products and no one should go without  
6 because of cost. I am proud that New York City will  
7 be at the forefront of providing our students and  
8 vulnerable populations with free access to feminine  
9 hygiene products.  
10

11 I would like to thank Speaker Melissa  
12 Mark-Viverito and Council Members Julissa Ferreras-  
13 Copeland and Laurie Cumbo for leading a national  
14 conversation on these important issues.

15 Before I discuss the legislation, I want  
16 to provide some background information on the  
17 Commission on Gender Equity, its mission and goals  
18 and some of the administration's key accomplishments.

19 The New York City Commission on Gender  
20 Equity (CGE) was created in July 2015 by executive  
21 order and signifies the administration's commitment  
22 to deepening work in this important area, a  
23 commitment that is further evidenced by my  
24 appointment as the first ever full-time Executive  
25 Director of the Commission.

1  
2 Executive Order 10 structures the CGE as  
3 an advisory body that supports City agencies to  
4 dismantle institutional barriers for women and girls  
5 and help achieve the Mayor's commitment to reduce  
6 gender-based inequality and build a safer, more  
7 inclusive and economically mobile city for women and  
8 girls. Our administration is committed to leveraging  
9 the full power of city government to expand and  
10 increase opportunity for all New Yorkers regardless  
11 of sex, gender identity or sexual orientation and  
12 build a city that is safe and free of discrimination.

13 The Mayor and the First Lady have stated  
14 over and over that we cannot address inequality  
15 without making sure that we are creating good  
16 outcomes for women and girls. Specifically, the  
17 Commission on Gender Equity serves as an advisory  
18 group to the Mayor on initiatives and methods to  
19 achieve the goals of the Mayor's platform to reduce  
20 inequality with a focus on gender-based inequality;  
21 advocates for women, girls, transgender and intersex  
22 residents and supporters of these programs have been  
23 working with us very closely on our initiatives.

24 Over the past year New York City has made  
25 huge strides towards gender parity, including:

1  
2 establishing historic partnership with UN Women and  
3 becoming the first American city to join the UN Safe  
4 Cities Initiative; setting new goals and improving  
5 upon MWBE policies and practices to make contracting  
6 opportunities more easily available for businesses  
7 owned by women; creating innovative maternal mental  
8 health services through ThriveNYC, a mental health  
9 initiative led by First Lady Chirlane McCray; the  
10 historic rollout of Universal Pre-K, which made it  
11 easier for many working mothers to continue full-time  
12 work; expanding paid sick leave to many of the lowest  
13 paid industries that employ a disproportionate amount  
14 of women; signing new amendments to the Human Rights  
15 Law; making unprecedented investments in domestic  
16 violence response and education through the Mayor's  
17 Office to Combat Domestic Violence; issuing a  
18 personnel order providing six weeks of fully paid  
19 parental leave to City employees; adopting an  
20 executive order to mandate City facilities provide  
21 bathroom access to people consistent with gender  
22 identity; establishing the City's Commission on Human  
23 Rights as the first human rights agency in any major  
24 U.S. city to certify U and T visas for immigrant  
25 victims of crime and human trafficking; framing the

1  
2 earned income tax credit as a women's issue and  
3 encouraging low-income women and mothers to take  
4 advantage of 200 free tax prep services and the EITC;  
5 appointing and promoting an unprecedented number of  
6 women to leadership positions in agencies and City  
7 Hall, with women serving in 50 percent of the  
8 administration's senior leadership positions.

9           The administration looks forward to  
10 working with City Council to implement these  
11 important pieces of legislation around access to  
12 feminine hygiene products. This legislation is also  
13 in line with New York City's strong Human Rights Law.

14           **Now Int. 1128.**

15           I will now turn to Int. 1128 in relation  
16 to ensuring that students in each school have direct  
17 access to feminine hygiene products in school  
18 bathrooms.

19           As you're aware, at the beginning of the  
20 2015-2016 school year, the DOE, in partnership with  
21 Council Member Ferreras-Copeland, launched a feminine  
22 hygiene product pilot program, providing free tampons  
23 and sanitary pads at the High School for Arts and  
24 Business in School District 24. The pilot was  
25 created to meet the needs of students who might not

1  
2 have feminine hygiene products on hand during the  
3 school day.

4           In March 2016, the pilot was expanded to  
5 25 middle schools and high schools in School District  
6 9 and 24; in total, the feminine hygiene product  
7 pilot has placed 380 dispensers in bathrooms across  
8 25 middle and high schools. DOE is actively  
9 requesting feedback on the pilot to assess the impact  
10 of the program at each school. School principals  
11 have responded positively to the program.

12           In support of the pilot, families and  
13 students were provided a letter announcing the  
14 program and informational posters were placed by  
15 produce dispensers. We asked schools to identify a  
16 trusted staff member to receive training and be  
17 available to assist students and parents with any  
18 questions or concerns; parent workshops, student  
19 information sessions and feminine hygiene resources  
20 will also be made available in the 2016-2017 school  
21 year.

22           The administration is committed to  
23 meeting the needs of the whole child and providing  
24 easy access to feminine hygiene products in middle  
25 and high school and we believe that it is essential

1  
2 to ensuring that our students have the support they  
3 need to focus on learning and feel comfortable during  
4 classes. While the administration may have some  
5 technical amendments to this bill, we are strongly  
6 supportive of this proposal.

7 **Int. 1123.**

8 Int. 1123 expands availability of  
9 feminine hygiene products in DHS, HRA and DYCD-run  
10 shelters. The administration fully supports the  
11 goals and intent of Council Int. No. 1123. The  
12 Department of Social Services strongly encourages the  
13 Council to include all Department of Homeless  
14 Services and Human Resources Administration shelter  
15 facilities in the bill. The expansion will ensure  
16 maximum distribution of feminine hygiene products to  
17 all clients who require such products, including  
18 those in HIV/AIDS Services Administration shelters  
19 and at single adult male shelters.

20 As currently drafted, DSS is concerned,  
21 for example, that a transgender man or intersex  
22 individual residing in a DHS single male shelter or a  
23 HASA shelter would be excluded from benefiting from  
24 access to such products. Further, individuals  
25 residing HASA shelters include female populations as

1 well as young women. HRA and DHS are happy to work  
2 in partnership with the Council to develop language  
3 that is fully inclusive and ensures everyone who  
4 needs feminine hygiene products has access to such  
5 products. HRA and DHS support education or a notice  
6 requirement that may need to accompany the  
7 availability of these products in men's shelters and  
8 would like to roll it into border agency-wide  
9 sensitivity training.

11 The bill is aligned with DSS and DYCD's  
12 goals of ensuring that all our clients are treated  
13 with dignity and respect when accessing the city's  
14 shelter system and other social services.

15 In order to maximize resources we would  
16 like to work with the Council to limit the definition  
17 of feminine hygiene products to only include tampons  
18 and sanitary napkins. Limiting the definition means  
19 that HRA and DHS would not be responsible for  
20 providing specific brands or products that are  
21 unavailable locally or domestically.

22 Currently, each resident at an HRA  
23 shelter is provided with a toiletry packet and may  
24 request feminine hygiene products, which are provided  
25 in a timely fashion. The process is similar at DHS

1 facilities; while toiletry bags are not offered, each  
2 client can request feminine hygiene products and such  
3 products are made available as part of meeting the  
4 basic needs of youth in residential services. DYCD's  
5 runaway and homeless youth shelter bed providers  
6 already offer feminine hygiene products; these items  
7 are reimbursable program expenses under DYCD's  
8 contract and DYCD ensures that they are available to  
9 anyone that needs them.  
10

11 The agencies feel strongly that every  
12 time a client is provided with these products they  
13 are able to save a little more money on their  
14 **[inaudible]** and more economically secure future for  
15 New Yorkers.

16 **Int. 1122.**

17 The New York City Department of  
18 Corrections recognizes the importance of ensuring  
19 that all females in its custody have adequate access  
20 to feminine personal hygiene products; all female  
21 inmates are housed in the rows and finger centers.  
22 Within the facility genetic sanitary napkins and  
23 tampons are distributed at each housing area on a  
24 weekly basis; additional supplies are provided upon  
25 request. I have spoken to my colleagues at the

1  
2 Department of Corrections who report that there are  
3 generally no access issues; if an area's supply does  
4 get low; the officer requests to have additional  
5 supplies delivered. In the unlikely event that an  
6 area does run out, a captain can obtain supplies from  
7 another unit until a new delivery arrives. The items  
8 are provided at no cost to the inmates; brand name  
9 items can be purchased through the commissary if  
10 someone prefers to use that option.

11 The department's policy for the provision  
12 of all feminine hygiene products is guided by the  
13 standards of the New York State Commission of  
14 Corrections, the State Correctional Oversight  
15 Authority. DOC does not have any concerns about the  
16 implementation of Int. 1122, as the bill matches the  
17 State standards and the department's current policy  
18 is already in alignment with the proposal.

19 I would like to reiterate that there is  
20 still much work to be done to ensure true gender  
21 equity in New York City and I look forward to working  
22 together to make that happen. The Commission on  
23 Gender Equity helps to advise the Mayor and the  
24 administration as we work to create meaningful and  
25 sustainable change for women and girls, regardless of

1  
2 class, race, ethnicity, age, ability to speak  
3 English, sexual orientation; gender identity in New  
4 York City.

5           In closing, I want to recognize the  
6 incredible work of The Speaker, the Young Women's  
7 Initiative, Chairperson Cumbo and the Committee on  
8 Women's Issues; your work on behalf of New York City  
9 women and girls has been exemplary. We look forward  
10 to continuing to work collectively with our partners  
11 to advance gender equity. These bills represent an  
12 important step forward toward our shared goal;  
13 together we will ensure that all New Yorkers have  
14 access to essential medical supplies. I and my  
15 colleagues from other affected agencies would be  
16 happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank  
17 you.

18           CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Thank you. I wanna  
19 thank you so much for your testimony today and I  
20 really am excited because it's rare that the  
21 administration and the Council see so eye to eye on a  
22 particular issue and so this is certainly exciting  
23 that we are all on the same page.

24           Wanted to just be clear on some of these  
25 matters in hearing your testimony. Is the

1  
2 administration supportive of all of these bills as  
3 presented as well as the resolution or can you get  
4 more detailed specifically on certain bills that you  
5 may have some issue with as precisely as you can?

6 AZADEH KHALILI: I would say that we are  
7 supportive of the bills and we strongly support the  
8 Council's effort to expand access to feminine hygiene  
9 products for all New Yorkers and we do believe that  
10 we would like to work with the Council on some of the  
11 technical issues in the bill.

12 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Okay. Have you  
13 anticipated or looked at the costs that will be  
14 associated with this piece of legislation, especially  
15 particularly 1122?

16 AZADEH KHALILI: I think at this point,  
17 Council Member, we would like to agree to the  
18 language of the bill and if we're in full agreement  
19 with some of the technical changes, then I think we  
20 can move to the cost of the bill.

21 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Okay. Wanted to talk  
22 and get more in-depth with the Board of Corrections.  
23 It states that the Board of Corrections' minimum  
24 standards provides that all women prisoners shall be  
25 provided at department expense with necessary hygiene

1  
2 items; how does the department define "necessary" and  
3 how often does the Department of Corrections review  
4 the adequacy and effectiveness of its policy on  
5 feminine hygiene products?

6 AZADEH KHALILI: Council Member, I would  
7 like to invite Warden Clifford from the Department of  
8 Corrections to answer your question.

9 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Thank you. Good  
10 morning.

11 WARDEN CLIFFORD: Oh okay. Can you hear  
12 me?

13 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Yeah.

14 WARDEN CLIFFORD: Every inmate upon  
15 admission receives the necessary, you know, hygiene  
16 items, such as soap, toothbrush, toothpaste, drinking  
17 cup, toilet paper, towel, comb, and a hairbrush.  
18 Feminine hygiene items are given if they request it  
19 upon admission and once they're housed in a housing  
20 unit, they're readily available.

21 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: How are they readily  
22 available?

23 WARDEN CLIFFORD: Some housing areas have  
24 a bucket that they just keep them by the bathroom  
25 entrance, so they don't even have to ask for it; some

1  
2 housing units that it's not feasible to keep the  
3 bucket, 'cause it might be unsafe, you know they  
4 might trip over it, they'll keep it by the bubble  
5 window and they just have to take it through the  
6 window.

7 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Is there ever a cost  
8 associated with inmates needing feminine hygiene  
9 products... [interpose]

10 WARDEN CLIFFORD: No.

11 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: or access and having  
12 to pay for them?

13 WARDEN CLIFFORD: No, they could buy the  
14 brand names through commissary; there's an Always  
15 Maxi Pad available with wings and the Tampax Tampons  
16 are available in commissary that they can buy  
17 themselves, but the department at the department  
18 expense gives out pads and tampons.

19 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: So can you explain  
20 that to me again, I was distracted for a moment, in  
21 terms of a cost that you can pay at commissary? What  
22 would you be able to purchase there?

23 WARDEN CLIFFORD: Okay. Always Maxi Pads  
24 with wings; it's a 16-count box and it's \$4.63, and  
25 the Tampax Tampons; it's a 10-count box for \$3.90;

1  
2 that's at the commissary, but the department issues  
3 at the department expense for free charge, it's in  
4 every housing area, are pad and a tampon, but they're  
5 like generic. I have them here if you wanted to see  
6 them.

7 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: So you can receive a  
8 generic amount that's distributed freely, but if you  
9 wanted let's say name brand products, then you would  
10 have to purchase those?

11 WARDEN CLIFFORD: Yes.

12 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Can you talk to me a  
13 bit about -- are you aware of complaints by inmates  
14 at Singer regarding access to feminine hygiene  
15 products?

16 WARDEN CLIFFORD: I haven't been; it  
17 really isn't an issue that comes across my desk..  
18 [crosstalk]

19 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Uhm-hm.

20 WARDEN CLIFFORD: or when I'm touring in  
21 the building, uh really nothing that comes across.

22 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: And why would  
23 different houses have different policies about the  
24 distribution...? [crosstalk]

1  
2 WARDEN CLIFFORD: It's the structure..  
3 It's the structure of the building. We have a newer  
4 wing that has a more open area for the bathroom as  
5 opposed to the older structure of the building, so  
6 it's just a matter of the structure.

7 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Okay. And what are  
8 your thoughts on this particular piece of  
9 legislation?

10 WARDEN CLIFFORD: I think it's fantastic.

11 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: How do you think it  
12 would change anything that's already happening at  
13 this point?

14 WARDEN CLIFFORD: At DOC?

15 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Uhm-hm.

16 WARDEN CLIFFORD: It wouldn't change  
17 anything at all. We give them out and we have no  
18 issues, as far as I'm con... you know my notice at all.

19 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Okay. I'm just  
20 hoping, because in many of our hearings, after the  
21 administration leaves and then the advocates and  
22 those that have come through your doors often say  
23 something very different, but I do hope that they are  
24 on the same page and that we're able to move forward  
25 in that way.

1  
2 Wanted to talk about the process in our  
3 schools; are you prepared to discuss how feminine  
4 hygiene products are currently distributed within the  
5 Department of Education?

6 AZADEH KHALILI: Yes, Council Member, we  
7 are prepared to discuss that and I would like to ask  
8 my colleague from the Department of Education to  
9 discuss it.

10 FEMALE VOICE: Do you have a specific  
11 question?

12 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Yes. Wanted to just  
13 understand, on the... because we talked about middle  
14 school and high school, but wanted to also understand  
15 in elementary school as well, because a menstrual  
16 cycle can begin at 10, 11 and 12 years of age; what  
17 is the policy of distribution on our elementary  
18 school age young women?

19 FEMALE VOICE: We currently don't have a  
20 centralized process for distributing feminine hygiene  
21 products; each school makes provisions for students  
22 and we made products available through the principal  
23 and school nurses.

24 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: So that's just in  
25 elementary or that's all standard.. [crosstalk]

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FEMALE VOICE: That it is on all...

CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: in elementary, junior high school as well as high school?

FEMALE VOICE: All schools, any student that requires feminine hygiene products during the course of the day has them available.

CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Has them available?

FEMALE VOICE: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: But in your first answer you had mentioned having to go to the principal's office.

FEMALE VOICE: No, the principal makes the decisions on how or who the staff member is that has the products; generally it's the nurse's office that has them.

CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: So if a young woman wanted to have access to feminine hygiene products, she would have to go to an adult in order to acquire them?

FEMALE VOICE: Currently, yes and we are piloting a program in 25 schools where they don't have to go to anyone; the dispensers are in the bathroom and available to them.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Can you talk about  
3 how that pilot program has functioned and what have  
4 been the pros and cons of that pilot program and what  
5 did that pilot program exactly look like?

6 FEMALE VOICE: Sure. We started one  
7 program in September in District 24 in Queens at  
8 **[inaudible]**... [crosstalk]

9 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Of 2015?

10 FEMALE VOICE: yes, of 2015, and we  
11 expanded the pilot to 25 schools in Districts 9 and  
12 24 in March and so far we've generated really  
13 positive feedback on the program and we're very  
14 excited to partner with the Council on this.

15 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: And what was the... it  
16 was a dispenser that was available in the restroom?

17 FEMALE VOICE: We have installed 380  
18 dispensers in these 25 high schools in the girls'  
19 bathrooms, high schools and middle schools, excuse  
20 me, in the bathrooms and we have posters with  
21 information next to each dispenser.

22 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Are the products  
23 free?

24 FEMALE VOICE: The products are free of  
25 charge.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: And what have you  
3 found, just because it's really important to know  
4 that because in terms of people that are challenging  
5 this particular piece of legislation or not in favor  
6 of it or find that it's gonna be problematic will  
7 often say that girls are gonna come into the bathroom  
8 and they're gonna play with them, they're gonna take  
9 some home for family and friends or for use for the  
10 whole year or -- all of these types of stereotypes or  
11 thoughts will be conjured up; what is the reality of  
12 the situation that's happening through this pilot  
13 program?

14 FEMALE VOICE: We just extended the pilot  
15 in March and we're still assessing things, but so far  
16 it's working pretty well; I don't know of these types  
17 of challenges and volume; these are kids; we're gonna  
18 experience... [crosstalk]

19 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Uhm-hm.

20 FEMALE VOICE: some kids are gonna play  
21 with the products; I don't think it's a free for all;  
22 I think that everybody understands that the products  
23 are available should they need during the day and  
24 we've generated pretty positive feedback from our  
25 principals.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: And who paid for the  
3 ability for this pilot program to be implemented?

4 FEMALE VOICE: The pilot is being self-  
5 funded by the DOE.

6 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Oh that's fantastic.  
7 And is there an intention to... even prior to this  
8 legislation; was there an intention to expand it  
9 throughout all schools?

10 FEMALE VOICE: We've been looking at how  
11 that would look, yes.

12 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Okay. And so we  
13 understand with this piece of legislation, when it is  
14 passed; do we understand what the costs will be  
15 associated to retrofit bathrooms or dispenser areas  
16 throughout all of New York City's public schools?

17 FEMALE VOICE: We are clear of what the  
18 range is; what it will cost exactly, that remains to  
19 be determined and in partnership with OMB.

20 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Can you at this time  
21 state what that range would be?

22 FEMALE VOICE: Sure. It'll be somewhere  
23 between \$2 million and \$5 million to begin the  
24 program and then possibly about a million or two less  
25 than that to maintain it on an annual basis.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Okay. And how long  
3 do you think it would actually take to get New York  
4 City's public schools up to speed in order to be able  
5 to have this function available?

6 FEMALE VOICE: Probably take us about 8-  
7 14 weeks to have all schools outfitted.

8 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Oh that's fantastic.  
9 Okay. Well I know that a lot of my colleagues have  
10 questions and they also have to get back to their  
11 budget hearings. I also wanna recognize that we've  
12 been joined by Congresswoman Grace Meng, and she will  
13 be speaking on the next panel and we're very pleased  
14 to have her here. We've also been joined by Council  
15 Members Ben Kallos from Manhattan and Elizabeth  
16 Crowley from Queens, and now I am going to open it up  
17 for questions to Council Member Crowley, followed by  
18 Council Member Mealy.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Thank you to our  
20 Chair, Laurie Cumbo; to the sponsor of this bill,  
21 Council Member Ferreras-Copeland and The Speaker and  
22 all those who've sponsored this legislation, and  
23 especially the Congresswoman who's here today for her  
24 leadership.

1  
2 I can't believe somebody didn't think of  
3 this earlier; I remember as a kid, when I got my  
4 period and I needed a tampon or a pad, you know I was  
5 a little embarrassed and I certainly never would've  
6 gone to the principal's office and so it's forward  
7 thinking, it's smart and it's certainly necessary.

8 Now the Department of Education said it  
9 would take 8-14 weeks to install I guess the  
10 machines, but I do think that you could probably put  
11 the tampons and the maxi pads in the bathrooms so  
12 that they could be accessible right away; did the  
13 department think about doing that, just so they could  
14 speed up the process of implementation until you get  
15 to a point where you could have a machine?

16 FEMALE VOICE: We could certainly work to  
17 expedite the process of installing the dispensers for  
18 making the products available in the schools; I think  
19 that it should be done in a respectful manner and  
20 just leaving boxes out for girls is probably -- it  
21 may not be met with positive feedback; the dispensers  
22 have been fabulous, and we still have to order the  
23 products, so it would probably take us the same  
24 amount of time to get the products and install the  
25

1  
2 dispensers, but we're certainly open to exploring  
3 other options if it will save us on time.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: For the schools  
5 that have implemented this program and have the  
6 machines in the bathrooms, have they gone through  
7 more tampons and maxi pads than the other schools  
8 that still traditionally have the principal's office  
9 or the school nurse that dispenses?

10 FEMALE VOICE: I'm not aware of those,  
11 but I can look that up.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: The products. I  
13 would imagine the products will be used more  
14 frequently and certainly needed and so I think that's  
15 why this is a real important bill. I'm the Chair of  
16 the Criminal Justice Committee, so I'm happy to hear  
17 that the Department of Corrections already gives  
18 feminine products to inmates.

19 And so I just wanted to compliment the  
20 leaders; I'm proud to be a co-sponsor, and I hope  
21 that we could get to implement this program in our  
22 schools as quickly as possible. Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Thank you for your  
24 questions and I'm actually going to bring it back  
25 over to Council Member Karen Koslowitz and then

1  
2 Council Member Darlene Mealy for questions; Council  
3 Member Koslowitz will make a brief statement.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER KOSLOWITZ: Thank you.

5 It does my heart good today sitting here;  
6 however, however, in 1993, when I, along with my  
7 fellow colleague at that time, the late Antonio  
8 Pagan, introduced this bill, it never even went to a  
9 hearing; nobody ever talked about it; it never went  
10 to any kinda hearing and even today it's a shame that  
11 we have to have a hearing on this item that is so  
12 vital to so many people in this world and especially  
13 in this city and I just wanna say again, it does my  
14 heart good that this is moving along; I wanna thank  
15 Congresswoman Grace Meng; she's my congresswoman, and  
16 I wanna thank Council Member Julissa Ferreras-  
17 Copeland and also The Speaker for bringing this here  
18 today. So thank you for bringing it back. We didn't  
19 have to have a hearing when they distributed condoms.

20 [background comments, clapping, laughter]

21 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Well thank you,  
22 Council Member Koslowitz for keeping it real.  
23 [laughter] Always need that historical perspective  
24 and it's really important to know whose shoulders we  
25 stand on when we bring our brilliant ideas forward;

1  
2 they often come from brilliant women who have come  
3 before us.

4           Wanna bring it over now to Council Member  
5 Darlene Mealy. Council Member Mealy has to go; she's  
6 been called to her delegation meeting; please  
7 remember to represent me, and so now I will bring it  
8 over to Council Member Ben Kallos.

9           COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: I'd like to thank  
10 our Chair, the sponsor of the legislation, Speaker  
11 Melissa Mark-Viverito, as well as Council Member  
12 Ferreras-Copeland and Council Member Rodriguez; this  
13 is an issue of equity; everyone should have access to  
14 hygiene products and they must be treated equally  
15 without being taxed for some but not for all; this is  
16 a long time in coming; should not have taken this  
17 long and I am glad that it is this Council that is  
18 finally doing something about it. Thank you to  
19 everyone involved; I'm proud to be a member of the  
20 Women's Issues Committee and looking forward to  
21 voting these bills through, which I am also a  
22 sponsor.

23           [background comments]  
24  
25

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Thank you. And now  
3 I'm going to bring it over to my colleague, Council  
4 Member Ferreras-Copeland.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS-COPELAND: Thank  
6 you, Chair. And I wanted to take this opportunity to  
7 thank the administration, who has been steadfast in  
8 my advocacy; some of our first meetings were a little  
9 bumpy, but I think we've smoothed out the road and  
10 I'm very excited to see that we'll be working  
11 together to implement this for all women and all  
12 people in New York City.

13 I also wanted to kind of put this on our  
14 advocates -- this is the first step; these were the  
15 first focus [sic] that we were able to make change  
16 swiftly through this roundtable, but as I had  
17 mentioned in the budget hearing, I think we should  
18 have products in our libraries; I think we should  
19 have products in our recreation centers, so now I put  
20 this back on you; we have to continue the fight and  
21 continue the advocacy, because we advocate with facts  
22 and we advocate with sense; this isn't us trying to  
23 just do things ad hoc, so I'm really looking forward  
24 to our continued engagement on this process and I'm  
25 gonna be running back downstairs in 30 seconds, so.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Okay. Thank you. So  
3 we thank you for your testimony, thank you very much  
4 for being here today; we're excited to see this  
5 implemented and I'm excited to see a full panel of  
6 women as well as a full Council of women today,  
7 followed by a he or she with Ben Kallos on the end,  
8 so we're very happy to have... [interpose]

9 FEMALE VOICE: Thank you very much.

10 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: all of you here today  
11 and we'll call up the next panel, which will be  
12 Congress Member Grace Meng.

13 We are pleased to welcome you here today  
14 and I'm pleased to see you in orange as well as we  
15 begin our Anti-Gun Violence Awareness Month and you  
16 may begin your testimony.

17 CONGRESSWOMAN MENG: Speaker Mark-  
18 Viverito, Chairperson Cumbo; members of the New York  
19 City Council Committee on Women's Issues, thank you  
20 so much for this opportunity to testify on these  
21 important pieces of legislation in front of your  
22 committee today.

23 I've been working on the issue of  
24 menstrual equity for the past year and on many of the  
25 same issues addressed in today's legislation. Access

1  
2 to affordable feminine hygiene products is a serious  
3 and ongoing need for women and girls in the United  
4 States. When women are able to purchase quality,  
5 safe and affordable feminine hygiene products we are  
6 able to continue on with our daily lives with minimal  
7 interruption. It is baffling to me that these  
8 products are still treated as luxury items in our  
9 laws, even though these are products that are  
10 absolute health care necessities.

11           The American people have acknowledged  
12 this; according to a Feeding America survey from  
13 2011, people across the country, at all income  
14 levels, listed feminine hygiene products as "items  
15 that cannot be foregone or easily substituted."  
16 Women make up more than 50 percent of the U.S.  
17 population and in an average lifetime a woman will  
18 use about 10,000 tampons or pads, two of the most  
19 common types of feminine hygiene products.  
20 Purchasing these products is a continuous and costly  
21 expense that women must bear for much of our lives,  
22 from when menstruation begins at about age 12 to the  
23 time of menopause. Many women will spend at least  
24 \$7,000 over the course of our lives managing our  
25 menstrual flow. When women do not have access to

1  
2 sanitary feminine hygiene products, they are forced  
3 to substituted cheap materials and this can cause  
4 some serious health problems. When homeless women  
5 cannot purchase feminine hygiene products and do not  
6 have access to them at homeless shelters, there are  
7 reports that women have been forced to use rags or  
8 bleed through clothes until they throw them out or  
9 get new ones when they do not have access to  
10 appropriate hygiene items. When girls can't afford  
11 feminine hygiene products they may miss multiple days  
12 of school every month. When incarcerated women are  
13 not provided with an adequate supply of products,  
14 they are also forced to bleed through their clothes  
15 and in their living space. Unfortunately, this is  
16 something that is happening every single day in the  
17 United States. Despite the obvious necessity for  
18 accessible and affordable feminine hygiene products,  
19 women and girls in New York City face clear gaps in  
20 access. Nonprofits are attempting to fill some of  
21 these gaps and you will hear more about the dire need  
22 for these products from experts and advocates later  
23 in this hearing, but their work cannot and should not  
24 substitute for good government policies that can  
25 permanently close gaps in access.

1  
2 New York City has a long illustrious  
3 history at the forefront of civil rights and human  
4 rights in this country; make no mistake, access to  
5 affordable, safe feminine hygiene products is a right  
6 that is currently being denied to women and girls in  
7 this city. Intros 1122, 1123 and 1128 all take  
8 concrete steps to rectify some of these problems and  
9 ensure that women and girls in New York City have  
10 access to affordable feminine hygiene products.  
11 These pieces of legislation will serve as an example  
12 to cities across the country as to how changes can be  
13 made at a local level to address the menstruation  
14 hygiene management needs of women and girls.

15 Resolution 1012 was an excellent example  
16 of what can be accomplished when all levels of  
17 government work together.

18 I wanna specific thank Councilwoman  
19 Julissa Ferreras-Copeland for her tireless advocacy;  
20 you know we are both moms of young boys and very  
21 busy, but we have had the privilege of texting each  
22 other and calling each other on occasion in the past  
23 few months as we work on these issues.

24 I also wanna thank so many of the  
25 advocates who have been working on this issue, and

1  
2 many of whom who are here today, thank you for your  
3 guidance, thank you for your tireless efforts as well  
4 and your patience.

5 I also wanna thank Councilwoman Karen  
6 Koslowitz for introducing this concept and this  
7 solution at a time when it was not so cool to do so.

8 I had personally called on Speaker  
9 Heastie and Majority Leader Flanagan in the State  
10 Legislature to help pass Assemblywoman Linda  
11 Rosenthal and Senator Serino's legislation, and I  
12 wanna thank them for their efforts as well.

13 With all parties working together we  
14 achieve success and we are now close to eliminating  
15 the tampon tax in New York State. This resolution in  
16 the Council was an important tool to help push that  
17 legislation through the State Legislature.

18 We need action at every level of  
19 government; that is why I introduced H.R. 3117, the  
20 Fund Essential Menstruation Products Act in Congress  
21 to help women and their families mitigate the costs  
22 of purchasing feminine hygiene products. This bill  
23 would add feminine hygiene products to the list of  
24 items that can be purchased with funds in a flexible  
25 spending account (FSA). An FSA allows for

1 individuals to place up \$2,550 of their income in an  
2 untaxed account where the money can be used for  
3 certain medical expenses, just like bandages,  
4 crutches and prescription medication. It only makes  
5 sense to include tampons, pads and other feminine  
6 hygiene products as well. This bill has been co-  
7 sponsored by members of Congress from around the  
8 country.

9  
10 I also plan to introduce legislation in  
11 the near future that would create a refundable  
12 federal tax credit for feminine hygiene products for  
13 individuals who regularly use them. We are currently  
14 in discussion with advocates and industry experts to  
15 best determine yearly expenses and we will scale the  
16 tax credit accordingly.

17 A family with three teenage daughters or  
18 a same-sex female couple should receive a credit in  
19 accordance with their real costs; a feminine hygiene  
20 product tax credit would help families afford these  
21 costly items and ensure that women and girls can  
22 continue to lead their lives without worrying about  
23 this basic health care cost.

24 In addition to this legislation, I was  
25 successful in adding feminine hygiene products to the

1  
2 list of eligible expenses for homeless assistance  
3 grants administered by the Federal Emergency Agency.  
4 We're also working on a federal multi-agency campaign  
5 to address the various issues of menstrual equity and  
6 access to these products that women encounter every  
7 day, whether they be in homeless shelters, prisons,  
8 schools and in the workplace.

9           From my seat on the House Foreign Affairs  
10 Committee I have been pushing the U.S. government to  
11 develop a comprehensive plan to address menstrual  
12 hygiene issues for women and girls abroad as well.

13           Menstruation hygiene management is a  
14 complicated issue because different populations of  
15 women and girls face different barriers in terms of  
16 accessibility and affordability. Intros 1122, 1123,  
17 1128 and Reso 1012 are good examples of the types of  
18 government policies that can help address these  
19 disparate issues. As elected officials we have a  
20 responsibility to ensure that women and girls have  
21 access to safe, quality and affordable feminine  
22 hygiene products however we can.

23           Thank you for the time, your time..

24 [interpose]

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Thank you, Madame.  
3 Thank you; it is certainly an honor to have you here  
4 today.

5 I just have a few questions and then I'm  
6 gonna turn it over to Council Member Crowley; wanted  
7 to know, what has your experience been on the federal  
8 level working on this issue; does it have bipartisan  
9 support; are people on both sides; how is it being  
10 received on the Congressional level?

11 CONGRESSWOMAN MENG: Well when I first  
12 started this issue some people, whether they be  
13 colleagues or just, you know, people around me said,  
14 "Do you wanna be known as the tampon lady?" And so I  
15 laughed, but I thought that this was a serious issue,  
16 this is an important issue; the lack of accessibility  
17 to these products is literally preventing girls in  
18 the U.S. and around the world from receiving a  
19 proper, basic education. In Congress, just a few  
20 weeks ago I testified in front of the House Ways and  
21 Means Committee; the members there were mostly men,  
22 so it was a little intimidating at first, but I  
23 thought it was important for them to understand the  
24 importance of how this affects not just democrats,  
25 but democrats and republicans, women and girls from

1 all around their country in their constituency. So I  
2 think the topic, at first glance, makes many people  
3 feel a little uncomfortable and it's almost a taboo  
4 topic and I'm sure advocates have truly understood  
5 and experienced this. But I think, you know part of  
6 the reason; obviously we want to pass legislation to  
7 make good, sound, effective policy, but part of the  
8 reason for us bringing up these bills is to start  
9 this conversation and to use it as an educational and  
10 informational tool to help the public understand the  
11 importance of changing the standard and changing the  
12 status quo and you know, so we are hopeful; it  
13 definitely makes some people uncomfortable, but we  
14 are hopeful.

16 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Can you talk more  
17 specifically about the legislation or package of  
18 legislation that you're looking to gain support on on  
19 the federal level... [crosstalk]

20 CONGRESSWOMAN MENG: Uh so...

21 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: and how is it similar  
22 to what we're introducing on the city level?

23 CONGRESSWOMAN MENG: Sure. Well again, I  
24 wanna thank all of you for the tremendous work. As  
25 you know, whatever happens in New York City is not

1  
2 only important just for folks in New York City, but  
3 New York City is often seen as a leader on many  
4 issues and so this will almost and hopefully have a  
5 domino effect on what happens in other local  
6 governments across the country.

7 Our first piece of legislation that we  
8 had introduced was about women being able to put  
9 these items into their FSA, Flexible Spending  
10 Account, and in this account items, like I mentioned,  
11 like bandages and crutches and contact lenses,  
12 they're included already, so these products are  
13 definitely more of a necessity and should be  
14 included.

15 You know this issue, as you all know, as  
16 we've heard even at the beginning of the hearing  
17 today, affects women on all different levels and so  
18 depending on the population, we have to work on it  
19 from different perspectives; we are working with  
20 different agencies, for example, Department of Labor;  
21 Health and Human Services, to address these potential  
22 programs in workplace bathrooms, in prisons, in  
23 homeless shelters; we were happy to be able to get  
24 these products included as part of... allow permitted  
25 products that grants to homeless shelters or

1  
2 organizations could actually purchase and distribute  
3 to their constituency.

4 We are also -- this is more complicated,  
5 but we are working on a tax credit; this is something  
6 that will catch the folks, different income levels  
7 in-between, maybe those who might not have use of a  
8 FSA and between the folks residing in a homeless  
9 shelter or prison, so we wanna catch as well the low-  
10 and middle-income women and families. So we're still  
11 working on the numbers; there is... when I talk about  
12 it with my staff and with advocates, you know we  
13 always try to see what's the precedent; there really  
14 is none; what you're doing here, there is not much  
15 precedent for doing something like this and so we  
16 depend a lot on our advocates who are here today and  
17 who have been working so hard on this and we will  
18 hopefully come up with legislation as well.

19 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Thank you. And we're  
20 excited to do what we're doing in New York City and  
21 we hope that it will help you on the federal level.  
22 Council Member Crowley.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Good morning,  
24 Congresswoman. Thank you for your advocacy in all  
25

1  
2 you're doing in the state and the city and of course,  
3 around the country.

4 I wanted to ask about your act; do you  
5 feel that it will pass soon or is there anything we  
6 could do as a city to help in passing this  
7 resolution?

8 CONGRESSWOMAN MENG: Thank you,  
9 Councilwoman Crowley. The one thing I've learned  
10 about Congress in my three-and-a-half years there is  
11 that everything is unpredictable; you know we've been  
12 able to work on and pass legislation that we thought  
13 had no chances of passing and at the same time, we've  
14 found to be at a stalemate with legislation that  
15 seems very commonsense, and so I am, you know not one  
16 to be overly optimistic, but at the very least,  
17 whether this takes a year or whether it takes  
18 multiple years to get done, we are hopeful that at  
19 least starting this conversation will get this on  
20 people's radars, and like I said, this is an issue  
21 that affects people in both republican and democratic  
22 districts and households and so we are hopeful that  
23 the republican majority in Congress will take  
24 favorably upon this legislation.

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Absolutely and  
3 it affects every single family and it's the right  
4 thing and the fair thing to do, so I know that you're  
5 persistent and that you will get this act passed and  
6 I again just wanna thank you for your leadership and  
7 your advocacy is so very important.

8 CONGRESSWOMAN MENG: Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Thank you, Congress  
10 Member, I wanna thank you for your testimony here  
11 today; we're gonna continue to work tirelessly here  
12 in the City Council to bring greater advocacy and to  
13 normalize this subject matter in our City Hall, all  
14 the way to Congress, because this is an issue that  
15 affects all of us and it should not be considered a  
16 taboo subject. So as you said, we are making  
17 unprecedented history here today, unprecedented  
18 "herstory" as I should say, and I think you so much  
19 for your testimony. Thank you.. [crosstalk]

20 CONGRESSWOMAN MENG: Thank you,  
21 Chairperson.

22 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Thank you.

23 We're going to call the next panel -- Jo  
24 Haines, Linea Mitchell, Jennifer Weiss-Wolf, and  
25 Judith Arroyo. We're going to go to a three-minute

1  
2 clock in the interest of budget negotiations that are  
3 going on at this present time, but we're certainly  
4 excited and anxious to hear each of your testimonies.  
5 So I understand that we have a student that's here  
6 today; would you like to begin?

7 LINEA MITCHELL: Sure.

8 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Thank you.

9 LINEA MITCHELL: Can you hear? Okay. So  
10 hi; my name's Linea Mitchell; I go to Brooklyn Tech;  
11 I know you're an alum... [interpose]

12 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: I'm an alum of  
13 Brooklyn Tech, yes.

14 LINEA MITCHELL: Yeah, you spoke at our  
15 last Ruby luncheon; I was there [sic].

16 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Oh fantastic.

17 LINEA MITCHELL: So as you know, Brooklyn  
18 Tech is one of the largest schools in the state; we  
19 have nearly 6,000 students, which means that it's a  
20 little ridiculous that there's little to no access to  
21 female hygiene products. If you need a pad or  
22 tampon, you're expected to go to the nurse in-between  
23 your classes, so we have four minutes to go to the  
24 nurse which is on the third floor in our school of  
25 nine floors and 6,000 students; you have to go get in

1  
2 line, tell her your name and OSIS number and what  
3 you're there for and then go get a pad and hope that  
4 she gives you a late pass and then go to the bathroom  
5 and try to make it back to class on time, which is  
6 highly unlikely in four minutes.

7 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: I remember those  
8 days.

9 LINEA MITCHELL: Uhm-hm. Not only this,  
10 but the nurse isn't allowed to distribute Advil and  
11 can only let you sit in her office or lay in her  
12 office for 5-10 minutes before she is forced to make  
13 you go back to class. So if there are people are  
14 like experience lots of pain during their period and  
15 they can't really move or they usually wanna stay at  
16 home, but they have to go to school for something, so  
17 they have to go to class and just kinda show and it's  
18 really a ridiculous process. So this means everyone  
19 basically just has to -- you know the girl in every  
20 class who has Advil and you know that girl in every  
21 class who has pads.

22 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Right.

23 LINEA MITCHELL: Yeah. It should be  
24 easier to access these products, like you should be  
25 able to go to a bathroom or go to any... you should be

1  
2 able to go anywhere and just grab a pad without  
3 having to go through this ridiculous process and then  
4 be penalized because you have to go through this  
5 process that you have no say in, and I'm just here  
6 speaking to the Council today because it's an  
7 important issue and it affects everyone from middle  
8 school to high school and even elementary school, as  
9 you said, and even though it's something that's taboo  
10 or would be considered taboo and even though I'm  
11 graduating this year, this is something that I hope  
12 will go through for people who come after me and that  
13 it becomes a less unheard of subject.

14 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Thank you; spoken  
15 like a true TechKnight; hope to see you at Spelman  
16 College too, but that's another time.

17 Thank you, because you really brought  
18 light to what that issue; how it really impacts you  
19 on a day to day basis to have to come late to a  
20 class, to have to go to a nurse, to wait on a line,  
21 to have to get the product and then to go back and  
22 get a lass pass, hopefully, to be able to return back  
23 to class really shows that it's taking away from  
24 academic time and performance and is a huge  
25 distraction the way the policy is currently set

1  
2 forth, so thank you very much. We'll have the next  
3 testimony.

4 JO HAINES: Thank you. Thank you,  
5 Council Member Cumbo and Council Member Ferreras-  
6 Copeland for the opportunity to address the  
7 committee; thank you Linea; Linea is a participant in  
8 our program. I'm Jo Haines, Executive Director of  
9 PowerPlay NYC. PowerPlay is committed to developing  
10 our girls and young women of New York City as leaders  
11 and advocates of their own independence and success  
12 and I think Linea is a perfect example of that.

13 As a partner in the City Council-funded  
14 Sports Training and Role Models for Success, the  
15 STARS Citywide Girls' Initiative, PowerPlay is a  
16 leader in the girls' youth development space and  
17 we're here to share our girls' firsthand experience  
18 with this important health issue.

19 Feminine hygiene products, as I think we  
20 all agree, should be readily available to girls in  
21 our schools; PowerPlay has made it a point to have a  
22 supply of pads and tampons on hand at our programs  
23 for girls to take as they need them and we believe  
24 the same approach should be taken in our schools.  
25 Girls should not have to encounter gatekeepers or

1  
2 other barriers to gain access to something that is a  
3 basic human necessity; supplies in our schools are  
4 either unavailable at all and when they are, girls,  
5 as Linea said, need to visit the nurse to request a  
6 pad, which makes them late to class and eats into  
7 valuable instruction time. These young women aren't  
8 ill; this is all perfectly natural, yet making them  
9 go to the nurse, we perpetuate a stigma that has no  
10 place today. The girls themselves are very clear on  
11 this issue -- make pads and tampons readily available  
12 in school and soon it will simply become the new  
13 normal.

14 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: That's right.

15 JO HAINES: Today in America and in New  
16 York City we should not have girls and young women,  
17 many who may not be able to afford menstrual  
18 products, ostracized and potentially absent from  
19 school, putting them at further risk of falling  
20 behind. We agree strongly with Council Member  
21 Ferreras-Copeland and Council Member Cumbo that this  
22 is not something girls should need to ask for; it's  
23 basic commonsense, it's basic human dignity and it's  
24 all about fairness and gender equity. Thank you for

25

1  
2 your time and consideration and leadership on this  
3 issue.

4 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Thank you; that  
5 really summed up a lot of what I'm sure everybody's  
6 thinking. Thank you very much. Next panelist.

7 JENNIFER WEISS-WOLF: Thank you so much  
8 for inviting me here today. My name is Jennifer  
9 Weiss-Wolf; I am a lawyer; I'm an executive at the  
10 Brennan Center for Justice at NYC School of Law.  
11 I've been working with Council Member Ferreras-  
12 Copeland on this issue for about the past year and  
13 I've been writing about it nationally; I've included  
14 with my testimony some select op-eds that I've done  
15 for the *New York Times*, *Time Magazine* and the *New*  
16 *York Daily News*.

17 What I really wanna do today is place the  
18 legislation that's being considered here in the  
19 context of the national and global landscape and why  
20 what you're doing is so groundbreaking.

21 I think everybody knows the issue is not  
22 new; equity in menstrual hygiene is something that  
23 we've been grappling with around the world for years  
24 and it's kind of stunning I think how far the United  
25 States has lagged behind in terms of its awareness,

1  
2 in terms of innovation; in terms of policy  
3 especially. As somebody said earlier, it's a problem  
4 that hides in plain sight here at home, even though  
5 it impacts half the population.

6 I think what's beginning to change though  
7 really is a national dialogue about it; there is this  
8 incredibly dedicated network of activists,  
9 journalists; of policymakers all around the country,  
10 so many of whom are here today, who've been working  
11 to ratchet up the national dialogue. I always joke  
12 that periods have gone public and political; *NPR*  
13 called last year the "Year of the Period" and  
14 *Cosmopolitan* magazine said it was the year the period  
15 went public.

16 I've been focusing specifically on  
17 policy, largely on the "tampon tax" question that  
18 we've talked about here today. Folks might know that  
19 around the world it's actually being addressed too;  
20 Canada eliminated it last summer; a petition in the  
21 United Kingdom has garnered 300,000 signatures and  
22 spurred a ruling by the European Union recently to  
23 allow its member states to reduce the value added tax  
24 on menstrual products to zero, and in Kenya the tax  
25 was actually eliminated over a decade ago and as

1  
2 well, the Kenyan government has actually been  
3 budgeting about the equivalent of \$3 million a year  
4 to distribute free menstrual products in schools to  
5 low-income communities, so the United States is  
6 really just catching up on this.

7           It's great that New York has been a  
8 pioneer in the tampon tax issue, but as we've  
9 discussed here today, the tax issue really just only  
10 scratches the surface; I think what the City Council  
11 is doing to ensue access to the most vulnerable  
12 populations is really where this discussion should be  
13 at.

14           The schools issue in particular -- again,  
15 it's national and global; First Lady Michelle Obama  
16 has advocated for exactly what New York City is  
17 proposing to do through her Let Girls Learn  
18 initiative. Across the country 20 percent of  
19 American teenagers live in poverty; it's 1 in 4 here  
20 in New York City, and as folks here [bell] so  
21 eloquently shared... is that for me? Alright; can I  
22 just... Can I skip to the end here...? [crosstalk]

23           CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: You can bring your  
24 comments to a close.

1  
2 JENNIFER WEISS-WOLF: So I'm gonna zip  
3 right through to the end and rather than sort of  
4 drive home the points about both the shelters and the  
5 corrections facilities that others have already  
6 shared, I just wanna say how lucky we are to live in  
7 the city which is really forging ahead an issue and a  
8 solution that is groundbreaking; we're lucky to have  
9 Congresswoman Meng representing us; we're lucky to  
10 have Assembly Member Rosenthal from New York City  
11 here pushing the tampon tax, and actually, I guess  
12 there's just one little quick thing that people might  
13 wanna know. I've been using a *Hamilton* quote lately  
14 to talk about how excited I was to attend this  
15 hearing where I've said, "History is happening in  
16 Manhattan; we just happen to live in the greatest  
17 city in the world," a great line from *Hamilton* and  
18 folks should know that Actor Daveed Diggs put out a  
19 video that's gone viral about menstrual equity this  
20 weekend on behalf of what's happening here in New  
21 York, so look for it online... [interpose]

22 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Oh.

23 JENNIFER WEISS-WOLF: and there you have  
24 it. Thank you so much New York City for what you're  
25

1  
2 doing to really lead the way for the rest of the  
3 country.

4 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Thank you, thank you  
5 so much for your testimony; it's exciting to hear  
6 about what's happening all over the world around this  
7 topic and it's exciting to be a part of the process.

8 JENNIFER WEISS-WOLF: One quick prop that  
9 folks might wanna know; this is really what's  
10 happening around the country; this is the cover of  
11 *Newsweek* magazine just a couple of weeks ago which  
12 also features the work that's happening here in New  
13 York City.

14 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Awesome. Thank you...  
15 [interpose]

16 JENNIFER WEISS-WOLF: Yes.

17 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: for sharing that;  
18 everybody should pick up a copy. Thank you. And  
19 we'll have our next panelist.

20 JUDITH ARROYO: Okay. Good morning,  
21 Chair Cumbo and Council Member Julissa Ferreras-  
22 Copeland and the rest of the committee. I do have  
23 written testimony here, but I've been listening; if  
24 you look at my testimony you see that I start out by  
25 saying that my members and I were a little puzzled

1  
2 when we were told about the bills, especially the  
3 bills concerning the schools. I represent... I'm  
4 Judith Arroyo; I'm the President of Local 436; I  
5 represent the public health nurses and public health  
6 epidemiologists that work in the City of New York;  
7 800 of those public health nurses are the nurses in  
8 the City school system and not just in the Board of  
9 Education; we are the only nurses in the nonpublic  
10 schools and we are the majority nurses in the charter  
11 schools and my members were a little puzzled about  
12 the legislation because they sort of felt, but we're  
13 doing this already. Sitting here and listening I  
14 realize, one; people don't realize that there are two  
15 different groups of school nurses in the school  
16 system; there are those that work for the Board of  
17 Education and there are my members that work for the  
18 New York City Department of Health and Mental  
19 Hygiene; we're public health nurses, and we tend to  
20 be invisible in the school system; they forget that  
21 we're there. So we not only give away the free  
22 tampons and napkins, as has been mentioned, but we  
23 also have been advocating for many, many years that  
24 these products should be available to the students in  
25 the girls' bathrooms. The scope and practice of a

1  
2 public health nurse is to educate and to support  
3 healthy living in communities and our community is  
4 the school, so we speak to the principals, we speak  
5 to the teachers; we try to teach them how this is  
6 part of the life cycle and it is not anything that is  
7 sick or anything to be embarrassed of. We do do the  
8 menstrual teaching and try doing that in the Catholic  
9 school or any other nonpublic school. We have  
10 spearheaded in those schools and had convinced them  
11 that it is normal and that we should be allowed to  
12 teach the girls and the young ladies in their schools  
13 about menstruation and that they should have access  
14 to Tampax and napkins, and we have been very  
15 successful in those schools; we do the same thing in  
16 the charters; we sometimes run into difficulties with  
17 parents, but we go to PTA meetings and we explain  
18 things to them as we go along. The DOE [bell] is  
19 thinking of putting those dispensers; we do support  
20 that; we do teach the students about menstruation and  
21 we do it in the elementary schools, we start there;  
22 we teach them that this is part of the life cycle,  
23 that it is normal, it is nothing to embarrass [sic];  
24 many of the public health nurses in these schools do  
25 encounter cultural barriers and when we do, we have

1  
2 to have one-on-one meetings with the parents to try  
3 to convince them to change their whole image of a  
4 woman in culture and in society. So we have risen to  
5 that challenge, but like I said, when people go into  
6 the school system and go looking for the school  
7 nurse, those of us who are public health nurses tend  
8 to be very invisible and we're forgotten, but we are  
9 your advocates there and if you come to us, we can  
10 help you certainly spread the word and support the  
11 legislation as we go along. Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Thank you. I think  
13 you bring up some very critical points and I think  
14 education is something that we haven't really spoken  
15 about, so when your members say that you are already  
16 doing this, certainly in the way of education and I  
17 think that the ability to dispense feminine hygiene  
18 products through a distribution tool is important,  
19 but I think what's also equally important is the  
20 ability to have that education, because it's young  
21 women coming into womanhood, it's also the ability to  
22 understand what does your menstrual cycle now mean  
23 for you and I think that the difference here is that  
24 in order to go to a nurse it means in many ways as  
25 you associated, that you're sick, you're not well,

1  
2 you're not feeling [background comment] good and I  
3 think for so many, such as your testimony, you may  
4 feel fine, you just need to get your tampon or you  
5 just may need to get a sanitary napkin and keep it  
6 moving... [crosstalk]

7 JUDITH ARROYO: Okay...

8 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: and you don't need,  
9 necessarily that kind of visit [**inaudible**]...  
10 [crosstalk]

11 JUDITH ARROYO: A quick comment on that.  
12 [background comments] In the schools, they're not  
13 sent to us so much that the adults of the school  
14 think that this is part of being sick; they're sent  
15 to us, and this was the policy that was decided many  
16 years ago, probably long before any of us were born,  
17 they're sent to the nurse to prevent the Tampax and  
18 the sanitary napkins from being flushed down the  
19 toilet; the whole idea is a way of keeping track of  
20 vandalism and theft and the prevention of that.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS-COPELAND: I  
22 really do appreciate your testimony and I hear you  
23 and I'm just... I don't mean to interrupt you, but we  
24 engage in a lot of conversations with the DOE and I  
25 think there's this misnomer; everybody has a fear --

1  
2 look, everybody knows that you go to the bathroom;  
3 kids take toilet paper and throw it up on the  
4 ceiling; do we not provide toilet paper? Not even  
5 thought of, you have to provide toilet paper; what we  
6 are now engaging in is yes, the DOE failed to provide  
7 trashcans in the girls' bathrooms or in any bathroom,  
8 so we have... now following up with a capital  
9 investment of making sure that there's garbage cans,  
10 'cause as you know, 'cause you've been in many of  
11 them... [crosstalk]

12 JUDITH ARROYO: And...

13 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS-COPELAND:  
14 there's no bath... there's no garbage cans in the  
15 stalls... [interpose]

16 JUDITH ARROYO: And we support that,  
17 Council Member... [crosstalk]

18 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS-COPELAND: I  
19 agree...

20 JUDITH ARROYO: we are on your side; we...  
21 we... [crosstalk]

22 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS-COPELAND: I  
23 know.

24 JUDITH ARROYO: can't understand why  
25 there's no soap, paper towels or anything and those

1  
2 are the reasons that were given, because there's  
3 vandalism and they throw them around and everything  
4 else, but the bulk of public health nursing is  
5 education and education here for us, it's not just  
6 the students; in fact, the students get it a heck of  
7 a lot better; we also educate the teachers, we also  
8 educate the parents and in many instances we have to  
9 spend a lot of time educating the principals and  
10 convincing them that if you do do the education, if  
11 you explain how things are done to everyone in the  
12 building and everyone in the community, then you will  
13 have less problems or you may not have the problems  
14 at all... [crosstalk]

15 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS-COPELAND: At  
16 all. I think you hit a very important point, as the  
17 Chair had mentioned. We partnered with HOSPECO in  
18 our first school and actually they found through the  
19 study that girls were going to school at a higher  
20 rate, so there was less absence, the girls were not  
21 abusing of the products; HOSPECO actually felt we're  
22 gonna have to put a lot more supplies than they  
23 thought; they planned for kind of reupping the  
24 products at a higher rate, so this is really about --  
25 most girls will bring the products with them; this is

1  
2 about that time... and so womanhood, you just don't  
3 know, you just don't know when you're gonna get it,  
4 and to be prepared. So I thank you for your  
5 partnership and we are in engagement with the DOE to  
6 discuss the education component and I think you would  
7 probably be the best partner for us to do that with,  
8 so you know, I think you for your testimony.

9 JUDITH ARROYO: Any help that the Council  
10 needs, you can certainly call me; we are part of  
11 Council District 37 and just get in touch with Henry.

12 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Thank you all for  
13 your testimony; thank you for being here and for  
14 shedding such great insight and light; proud to have  
15 a TechKnight in the house today; we're very happy to  
16 have you.

17 Our next panel will be Rachel Sabella  
18 from Food Bank for New York City; Sola Stamm, Andrea  
19 Nieves, and Elizabeth Adams from Planned Parenthood  
20 of New York City.

21 And we can begin with Rachel Sabella from  
22 Food Bank for New York City.

23 RACHEL SABELLA: Thank you. Good  
24 morning, my name -- or good afternoon, looking at the  
25 clock -- my name is Rachel Sabella and I am the

1  
2 Director of Government Relations at Food Bank for New  
3 York City, New York City's largest major hunger  
4 relief organization.

5 I wanna thank you, Chair Cumbo for the  
6 opportunity to testify today; Food Bank has been  
7 grateful to be a part of the roundtable that  
8 Councilwoman Ferreras-Copeland has hosted and are  
9 grateful to have the opportunity to share our voice  
10 today.

11 I'm gonna keep my remarks very brief; to  
12 be mindful of time and we wanna get you in Brooklyn  
13 delegation, championing all these things too.

14 But what I wanna say is; nearly 1.4  
15 million New Yorkers rely on our city's emergency food  
16 programs; they're there because of their inability to  
17 afford food, so it should come as no surprise that  
18 those same families that are seeking assistance at  
19 food pantries are often lacking access to other  
20 supplies. [background comment] When we have  
21 donations of nonfood items, they are the first to go  
22 from our shelves and when we have the feminine  
23 hygiene products, they come as a welcome relief to  
24 families and to our emergency food providers; it's a  
25 product they need and deserve.

1  
2 In February the *New York Times Lens Blog*  
3 actually visited one of our pantries and I wanna  
4 directly quote one of the clients that they spoke to  
5 and she said this is an awful choice that she and  
6 other low-income women face, "Do I buy feminine  
7 hygiene products when there are other necessities my  
8 family needs?" When these donations are not  
9 consistent, they don't have other options. We hear  
10 from our pantries and soup kitchens that when they do  
11 get packages of feminine hygiene products they're  
12 actually forced to rip them open and to almost ration  
13 out the number of products because there are too few.

14 So we are very excited that the City  
15 Council is holding these discussions and we think  
16 this package of legislation is the first step in the  
17 right direction to ensure all women have access to  
18 these products.

19 So thank you again for the opportunity to  
20 testify and we look forward to continuing to work  
21 with you on this.

22 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Thank you; I  
23 appreciate your critical testimony; when we're  
24 thinking about this, food pantries is not often what  
25

1  
2 first comes to mind, so your perspective on this is  
3 very valuable in the conversation. Thank you. Next.

4 [background comments]

5 SOLA STAMM: Can you hear me? Good  
6 morning, Chairperson Cumbo and thank you for the  
7 opportunity to provide testimony... [interpose]

8 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Is the mic on?

9 SOLA STAMM: Oh... [background comments]  
10 sure. Is that better?

11 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: That's much better.

12 SOLA STAMM: Great. So good morning,  
13 Chairperson Laurie Cumbo and thank you for the  
14 opportunity to provide testimony this morning in  
15 support of the bills before you.

16 My name is Sola Stamm and I am a Health  
17 Justice Community Organizer at the New York Lawyers  
18 for the Public Interest (NYLPI), a nonprofit advocacy  
19 organization.

20 NYLPI's Health Justice Program uses a  
21 wide range of advocacy tools, including community  
22 organizing, individual representation, impact  
23 litigation and legislative advocacy to try to address  
24 and resolve health disparity throughout the New York  
25 City. NYLPI aims to eliminate discrimination and

1 systemic barriers that limit access to health care.

2 It is from this health justice perspective that NYLPI  
3 strongly supports the passage of the legislation you  
4 are looking at right now. The passage of these bills  
5 would require DOHMH, the City's Health Department, to  
6 make menstrual hygiene products available to  
7 individuals and communities lacking economic  
8 resources for whom these products are often  
9 inaccessible. Making these products available at  
10 schools sends students the message that each of their  
11 attendance and academic focus are valuable. Further,  
12 these bills would aim to reduce stigma associated  
13 with menstruation through the provision of menstrual  
14 education and informational resources.

15  
16 Additionally, by eliminating the barriers  
17 that individuals living in temporary shelters face  
18 and taking care of their health while also trying to  
19 get by on limited resources, this legislation sends a  
20 strong message that each of these individuals deserve  
21 the same access to health care irrespective of where  
22 they are happening to be sleeping at night. And just  
23 as importantly, with the passage of these laws,  
24 incarcerated individuals would likewise not be  
25 limited to menstrual hygiene product **[inaudible]** or

1  
2 face financial constraints when having to purchase  
3 these items from the commissary.

4           NYLPI is encouraged by the success of  
5 Council Member Ferreras-Copeland's Queens-based pilot  
6 program that made menstrual hygiene products  
7 accessible in 25 different schools. The results of  
8 this pilot indicate reduced shame that students  
9 experience towards their reproductive physiology and  
10 their needs and also demonstrates the connection  
11 between academic focus and accessible health  
12 resources.

13           In regards to the particular language in  
14 the bills before you, NYLPI proposes changing  
15 feminine hygiene products to menstrual hygiene  
16 products; this modification of language is more  
17 inclusive to the spectrum of gender identity who  
18 experience menstruation.

19           NYLPI also proposes that each bill  
20 specifies that menstrual hygiene products are made  
21 "free of cost to individuals" to clarify the  
22 standards of accessibility.

23           Lastly, NYLPI recommends that in addition  
24 to public prisons, Int. No. 1122 make clear that  
25 immigration detention facilities in New York make

1  
2 menstrual hygiene products accessible upon request  
3 [bell] for the civil detainees housed in them. If I  
4 can close... if I could.

5 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Yes, ma'am.

6 SOLA STAMM: NYLPI thanks the Council for  
7 holding this hearing and for its commitment to the  
8 health and wellbeing of New York City communities and  
9 we urge you to pass these pieces of legislation.  
10 Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Thank you so much for  
12 your testimony. Thank you.

13 ELIZABETH ADAMS: Hi... [interpose]

14 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Hello.

15 ELIZABETH ADAMS: I'm Elizabeth Adams,  
16 Policy and Government Relations Manager of Planned  
17 Parenthood of New York City.

18 Thank you, Council Member Laurie Cumbo,  
19 Council Member Julissa Ferreras-Copeland, The Speaker  
20 Melissa Mark-Viverito and the entire Women's  
21 Committee today for their dedication to this issue.

22 PPNYC serves more than 53,000 patients  
23 annually in our five health centers, providing care  
24 regardless of immigration status or ability to pay.  
25 Access to menstrual products is a matter of public

1  
2 health; without them, individuals with periods may be  
3 forced to use unsanitary napkins to stanch blood flow  
4 which can lead to infection and increased risk of  
5 disease, including cervical cancer.

6 For women living in shelters that often  
7 lack regular access to privacy, menstruation can  
8 bring added risks of infections or a feeling of  
9 uncleanliness which can lead to depression. These  
10 risks are compounded by the economic burdens many New  
11 Yorkers are forced to confront, disproportionately  
12 impacting low-income women and low-income individuals  
13 with reproductive health care needs.

14 PPNYC is proud to support Council  
15 Resolution 1012 and we applaud the State's recent  
16 passage of the tampon tax bill and we look forward to  
17 the Governor signing it shortly. However, for many  
18 New Yorkers, even without the added tax on sanitary  
19 products, they're still out of economic reach for  
20 many New Yorkers and we urge the entire City Council  
21 to pass the full package of legislation before you  
22 today.

23 Int. 1123 would require the Department of  
24 Health and Mental Hygiene to provide menstrual  
25 products to all female residents in temporary

1  
2 shelters. Menstrual products are not covered by food  
3 stamps and temporary shelters are frequently  
4 understocked, unfairly forcing low-income individuals  
5 to pay more for their own hygiene.

6 We also support Int. 1128, which would  
7 require schools to stock menstrual products in  
8 bathrooms for students whose families may struggle to  
9 cover the cost or for those who simply forgot to pack  
10 a tampon or pad before leaving their house; their  
11 periods can be a dreaded experience, making focusing  
12 on school that much harder.

13 We specifically commend the law's  
14 requirement that middle schools and elementary  
15 schools stock menstruation hygiene products; it is  
16 often the students that get their periods at younger  
17 ages that are least prepared and most at risk of  
18 feeling shamed for the reproductive health care  
19 needs. Providing ready access to menstrual products  
20 supports the health of all of our young people and it  
21 also normalizes menstruation, pushing back against  
22 the period stigma so many women face.

23 Lastly, 1122 would require the Department  
24 of Corrections to issue menstrual products to inmates  
25 immediately upon request. Access to hygiene is a

1  
2 basic human right and New York City's jails can help  
3 address health inequities by providing timely access  
4 to menstrual care. However, I just wanna note, based  
5 on earlier testimony, that we know it's not just  
6 about the law; it's about implementation to make sure  
7 that women in jails are fully able to access those  
8 services. Women should not be forced to acquire a  
9 medical permit or spend their commissary earnings to  
10 achieve basic hygiene. [bell]

11 Thank you for your time today; at PPNYC  
12 we see firsthand the harmful consequences of economic  
13 barriers to health care that it has on our patients.  
14 Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

15 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Thank you so much for  
16 your testimony. Thank you for the light that you  
17 bring to this particular issue. We'll go to our next  
18 panelist.

19 ANDREA NIEVES: Hi. Good afternoon, my  
20 name is Andrea Nieves and I'm an attorney at Brooklyn  
21 Defender Services. At BDS we represent over 40,000  
22 indigent people in Brooklyn every year who are  
23 charged with crimes and we have been around for over  
24 20 years, so that means that we have represented  
25 thousands of women who have served time on Rikers

1  
2 Island; most of them are detained there pretrial  
3 because they're unable to pay bail. Many, many, many  
4 of them are there for drug crimes or crimes that are  
5 related to their relationships with men; the vast  
6 majority of them are victims of violence, have severe  
7 mental health issues, are often homeless,  
8 underemployed, and are often the main caretaker for  
9 their children. So the women who are at Rikers  
10 Island are already victimized and the testimony that  
11 we heard today from the administration and from the  
12 Department of Corrections does not match what we hear  
13 from our clients on a daily basis; we have social  
14 workers who go into Rikers Island to support our  
15 clients and what they tell us is quite different from  
16 what we heard today.

17 Most importantly, we're told that they're  
18 given a very small ration of feminine hygiene  
19 products, generally sanitary pads, and the number  
20 they tell us is usually 12. We know medical experts  
21 recommend that you change your pad every four hours,  
22 so if you're given only 12 pads for the time of your  
23 period, that would only last you two days; that's not  
24 a sufficient supply for many women with heavier  
25 flows.

1  
2 This is particularly troubling because  
3 what we hear from our clients is that these products  
4 are not readily available in the bathrooms, but  
5 instead, once they run out of their supply they have  
6 to ask the corrections officers for more pads and  
7 that can lead to a lot of problems and shame in their  
8 interactions with the guards and it's a method that  
9 the guards can use to control women, which is  
10 extremely problematic that they don't have easy  
11 access.

12 Now the warden today testified that they  
13 do have buckets with tampons and pads available; we  
14 had not heard this before; this is not what we're  
15 hearing from our clients; if that's so, I would say  
16 that that's something good moving forward, but at the  
17 same time the fact that they're in a bucket on the  
18 floor is very disappointing to me, because the main  
19 thing is that we want our clients to be treated with  
20 dignity and humanity; these are women who are  
21 overwhelmingly victims and yet they continue to be  
22 victimized at Rikers Island and so we fully support  
23 this legislation; this is a wonderful piece of  
24 legislation because if nothing else, it represents  
25 the community's commitment to women, to women's

1 health, [bell] but we recognize that it's gonna take  
2 a lot of advocacy on our end to continue to push DOC  
3 to actually provide pads and tampons in a way that  
4 recognizes the humanity of women, because right now  
5 they have a stated policy that mimics the law that to  
6 our understanding they're not complying with. So we  
7 welcome the support from the committee to assist us  
8 in our conversations with DOC to ensure that women  
9 really do have access to this; this bill is a great  
10 start and we think it can be an important negotiating  
11 tool, particularly now there's a federal monitor at  
12 Rikers, so the fact that there's a law in place will  
13 be huge in our ability to negotiate that they  
14 actually comply with the law, but we will need your  
15 assistance moving forward to ensure that. Thank you  
16 very much.

18 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: I thank you, because  
19 I often note that the testimony on the administration  
20 side from those who are working day to day on the  
21 ground are often very different..

22 ANDREA NIEVES: Yes.

23 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: and so it's important  
24 to note that so that we have an opportunity to really  
25 understand what's really happening on the ground in

1  
2 our prisons so that we can understand how sanitary  
3 napkins and tampons and all of those sorts of  
4 products are being distributed, menstrual products,  
5 not feminine hygiene products, that are being  
6 distributed throughout our prison systems. So I  
7 agree, the bucket sounds quite awkward and weird and  
8 I can't imagine what that looks like or where it's  
9 placed; it does seem like an inappropriate way to  
10 distribute something that's supposed to have sanitary  
11 surrounding it for something that's so personal. So  
12 thank you very much for your testimony and we  
13 continue to look forward to working with you all and  
14 particularly to expand it, as you said, to our food  
15 pantries and many other institutions where this will  
16 be necessary and needed. Thank you.

17 ANDREA NIEVES: Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Oh I understand we  
19 have some students from The New School who are doing  
20 a project on this; they are doing graduate work  
21 surrounding this issue. So I'm going to bring up --  
22 and please, I apologize if I have mispronounced some  
23 names -- Elise [sp?] Giggenblatt... Greenblatt [sp?],  
24 Katazina Robell [sp?], from the Graduate Research  
25 Team from The New School, Monica Llaguno, Graduate

1  
2 Research Team from The New School, and Daphne  
3 Reganhar [sp?], Graduate Research Team from The New  
4 School. Very unique names for some very unique women  
5 who are doing some extraordinary work; "The Future is  
6 Female," and you can begin and you can start by  
7 saying your name appropriately and correctly.

8 DAPHNE REGANHAR: There we go. Good  
9 morning distinguished members of the committee. My  
10 name is Daphne Reganhar; you actually pronounced it  
11 properly...

12 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Wow.

13 DAPHNE REGANHAR: uh... yeah... I'm a  
14 recently graduated alumna of the Graduate Program in  
15 International Affairs at the Milano School of The New  
16 School.

17 My three colleagues and I have spent the  
18 past five months conducting research in shelters to  
19 assess women's needs, access and experiences in  
20 regards to menstruation and menstrual products in the  
21 municipal shelter system.

22 Through interviews with shelter women, we  
23 came to understand the extra hurdle **[inaudible]** a  
24 homeless woman in the city and their monthly  
25 struggles to obtain adequate menstrual products,

1  
2 since 52 percent of the women interviewed said that  
3 they have faced lack of menstrual products and have  
4 to go without at some stage.

5           There is an average of 60,000 people  
6 sleeping in shelters every night in New York City,  
7 and some of you [sic] can imagine, being homeless  
8 means having to face numerous challenges every day,  
9 but homeless people who menstruate face an added  
10 obstacle every month and **[inaudible]** have an  
11 inconsistent access to menstrual products.

12           It is important to understand that even  
13 though menstruation is a natural process, it could  
14 lead to numerous health issues if not adequately  
15 managed. The literature suggests links between poor  
16 menstrual hygiene and urinary or reproductive tract  
17 infections and other illnesses. Moreover, certain  
18 hygiene practices are more likely to increase the  
19 risk of infection. For instance, some of the women  
20 we interviewed said they... they reported having to use  
21 toilet paper instead of tampons and rags instead of  
22 pads, which are very dangerous practices because it  
23 can cause the growth of bacteria that could lead to  
24 infection, and to make the situation worse, some of  
25 these infections caused by poor menstrual hygiene

1  
2 management could increase the risk of having  
3 reproductive health problems. Therefore, ensuring  
4 good hygiene practices during menstruation is highly  
5 important and for homeless persons this is directly  
6 related to the availability of menstrual hygiene  
7 products.

8           Furthermore, the lack of ability to  
9 afford or to obtain menstrual hygiene products has  
10 also great mental health impacts. Not having access  
11 to these products leaves people feeling helpless,  
12 ashamed and vulnerable which cycles them to  
13 depression. Adequate menstrual hygiene management is  
14 therefore essential for people to engage in society  
15 with dignity and comfort.

16           Finally, health and social research  
17 **[inaudible]** identified poor menstrual hygiene  
18 management as a critical development issue and an  
19 obstruction to achieving gender equity. We believe  
20 that empowering **[inaudible]** group of shelter  
21 menstruating persons is not only a matter of social  
22 justice and vital for the impacted group, but it's  
23 also critical for the development of society and the  
24 economy as a whole. Thank you.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Thank you. Thank you  
3 for your extraordinary work.

4 [background comment]

5 KATAZINA ROBELL: Good morning. My name  
6 is Katazina Robell; I go by Kat, and I'm from the  
7 same team.

8 So in our research we found that there is  
9 inconsistency with how menstrual products are  
10 provided in New York City shelters, because every  
11 shelter has a different contract with the City and a  
12 different way to deal with obtaining and distributing  
13 these products. The different approaches and the way  
14 that shelters receive their supply of menstrual  
15 products includes donation, including the products as  
16 an actual budget item in which case they are  
17 purchased and a combination of the two. Due to this,  
18 women are not sure what the process is at the  
19 shelters that they are assigned to and when they move  
20 from shelter their access changes because the process  
21 might be different at the shelter.

22 Based on our findings, we recommend the  
23 standardization of contracts between the City and the  
24 shelters in order to [background comments] ensure  
25 that these products are consistently included in the

1  
2 budgets and that the shelters inform the residents  
3 about how to obtain these products; this way the City  
4 will ensure nondiscrimination and fair and equal  
5 access to these products instead of women's access  
6 being dependant on luck. Thank you very much.

7 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Thank you.

8 ELISE GREENBLATT: Good afternoon. My  
9 name is Elise Greenblatt. As a part of our research  
10 we also found that though most of the shelters we  
11 visited did provide free menstrual products in one  
12 way or another, the products offered by the shelters  
13 generally do not match the varying needs of the  
14 users. When asked about the provided products, the  
15 women interviewed reported that they usually are very  
16 big, uncomfortable, unwinged pads that are not  
17 suitable for everyone's cycle, also, none of the  
18 shelters provided tampons.

19 We found only 4.8 percent of the women  
20 interviewed fully rely on the menstrual products  
21 provided by the shelters; the rest of the women have  
22 to spend money from their limited budget to purchase  
23 products to meet their needs.

24 Due to this, we recommend shelters to  
25 provide quality products and more variety to ensure

1  
2 these products meet the varying needs of the  
3 sheltered persons and guarantee the shelters spend  
4 their money on products that will actually be used by  
5 the residents. This is very important because all  
6 people menstruate differently and each day of the  
7 cycle is different and as a consequence, needs vary  
8 from person to person and day to day. Moreover, not  
9 providing the right products is also contributing to  
10 savings inequality in the shelters, where people who  
11 are not menstruating do not have this added expense,  
12 thus allowing them to save more money.

13 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Thank you.

14 MONICA LLAGUNO: Hello...

15 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Hi.

16 MONICA LLAGUNO: Can you hear me? Hi.

17 Good morning. My name is Monica Llaguno and I will  
18 discuss the last point of our research regarding how  
19 feminine hygiene products are provided and  
20 administered inside of the shelters.

21 In the shelters that do provide menstrual  
22 products, which are not all of them, women must ask  
23 the staff members to provide supply every time they  
24 need them, which those of us who have menstruated,  
25 like me, it's understandable how uncomfortable it

1  
2 could be to approach someone to ask or to justify the  
3 number of tampons or pads you may need or how often  
4 you need them, so the women interviewed of course  
5 mention lack of privacy and lack of confidentiality  
6 when asking for menstrual products and feeling  
7 uncomfortable having to ask, especially for those who  
8 have male staff members.

9           Even though most of the women interviewed  
10 consider that these products must be provided in a  
11 desk [sic] and by staff members, mainly concerned  
12 about the mismanagement of the products or by other  
13 residents, leading to shortages or intentional  
14 misuse, we do believe it's important for all feminine  
15 hygiene products to be readily available in all  
16 bathrooms to ensure privacy and to reduce the  
17 psychological impact that having to ask for the basic  
18 needs like menstrual products can cause in these  
19 women who are working to regain their independence.  
20 As mentioned by Council Member Ferreras-Copeland,  
21 access to these products is more important than the  
22 possibility of misuse and if there's a consistent  
23 supply of menstrual products we expect that over time  
24 the residents would become accustomed to having  
25 access and [inaudible] products will be reduced.

1  
2 Finally, as all of us, we would like to  
3 acknowledge the effort made that the temporary  
4 shelters to provide these hygiene products, but the  
5 limitations have to be pointed, lack of consistency  
6 and lack of quality and lack of variety, like of  
7 privacy are issues that need to be tackled and we  
8 believe that this legislation will provide a solution  
9 to that, and through this legislation we believe that  
10 the City will be contributing to gender equality and  
11 the empowerment of the shelter menstruating  
12 population, which in turn will benefit society as a  
13 whole.

14 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Thank you. Let me  
15 just say I'm so excited about the work that you all  
16 have done and I have a few basic curious questions.

17 Number one -- what inspired you all to  
18 take on this topic; how were you received when you  
19 visited the different shelters; were you well  
20 received on both sides, staffing, administrative-  
21 wise; were you able to talk to many of the residents  
22 to find out what their thoughts are in terms of how  
23 they feel about the process, and I also wanna know  
24 what grade did you all receive for this research that  
25 you've done?

[laughter]

MONICA LLAGUNO: I can go. Well it was... last semester that we encountered this issue, I believe we read an article regarding just the administration and how inaccessible menstrual products can be for different populations in the city; as we studied international development, we've come to realize there's issues within the U.S. that we need to regard and it was a long process to have access the shelters overall, so we had to contact many people and it's much of a bureaucracy that we had to go through, but we had access to five different shelters in which we were well received; the interviews were completely anonymous, so it was voluntary, a woman would come to us and as we said, sometimes we think of menstruation as a taboo, so not everyone wants to share information about how they manage their own hygiene, but we had many women willing to discuss with us, but most of them with sad stories that it was hard for us to relate of not having access or not wanting to ask, or many times using products that we would never imagine using instead of tampons and rags. So it was hard to hear, but it's exciting to know that there is an initiative

1  
2 taking care of this and we are full participants of  
3 the legislation and we got an A on our research.

4 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: That's what I'm  
5 talking about.

6 MONICA LLAGUNO: Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Oh that's fantastic.  
8 Did any of you wanna add something to it? Okay.  
9 Well I thank you so much for your testimony, it's  
10 incredible work that you're doing and I'm so pleased  
11 that you were able to share this work with the City  
12 Council and I hope that you will continue to work on  
13 this issue and many other issues that will bring  
14 about more equality for women throughout New York  
15 City and the nation. Thank you so much for your  
16 work.

17 [background comment]

18 DAPHNE REGANHAR: Thank you very much and  
19 thank you for the opportunity.

20 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Thank you.

21 [background comments] Okay. This will be the last  
22 panel; we'll actually call up five speakers --  
23 Nathalie Interiano, Care for the Homeless; Simone  
24 Thompson, Care for the Homeless; Belkys Garcia from  
25 The Legal Aid Society; Stephanie Gendell, Citizens'

1  
2 Committee for Children, and Danielle Castaldi-Micca,  
3 the National Institute for Reproductive Health. You  
4 may begin your... panel, starting from my left, your  
5 right or the other way around, yes... [crosstalk]

6 SIMONE THOMPSON: Hi. Is this on?

7 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Yes it is.

8 SIMONE THOMPSON: Hi, my name is Simone  
9 Thompson; I am the shelter Director of Susan's Place,  
10 a 200-bed shelter for mentally ill and medically  
11 frail homeless women in the Bronx, operated by Care  
12 for the Homeless. I am here today testifying on  
13 behalf of Care for the Homeless.

14 In addition to operating our shelter,  
15 Care for the Homeless is the oldest and largest  
16 provider of health care services exclusively to  
17 homeless people of all ages in New York City; we  
18 serve 8-10,000 individuals annually and about 35,000  
19 appointments at 30 State licensed and federally  
20 qualified health clinics in the Bronx, Brooklyn,  
21 Manhattan, and Queens. We also actively advocate for  
22 policies to fight and prevent and end homelessness.

23 We want to thank Chairman Julissa  
24 Ferreras-Copeland, Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito,  
25 Councilman Ydanis Rodriguez, and all members of the

1  
2 Women's Caucus and the Committee on Women's Issues  
3 for the critically needed and important legislation  
4 we are discussing today. We are proud to have been  
5 involved in advocating for and supporting this issue  
6 for the last two years.

7 Speaker Mark-Viverito's Intro 1122 and  
8 1123, along with Chairman Ferreras-Copeland's Intro  
9 1128, require ready access to free feminine hygiene  
10 products in homeless shelters, correctional  
11 facilities and public schools. This is a dignity  
12 issue; this is a health care and hygiene issue and  
13 this is a women's issue; thank you all for the work  
14 to make this happen.

15 It's surprising to many people that this  
16 needs to be debated in 2016, but as a number of Care  
17 for the Homeless clients and staff have shared with  
18 Chairman Ferreras-Copeland and her staff over the  
19 last two years; it really is an issue for them.

20 I'm pleased to report we have always made  
21 these products available at Susan's Place, but I've  
22 heard the stories from residents and other Care for  
23 the Homeless clients about the struggle women have  
24 had in some places in getting the supplies that  
25 should always have been readily available in a

1 dignified way to any woman who needs them. It's  
2 unimaginable that in New York City in 2016, public  
3 facilities like homeless shelters, serving a  
4 vulnerable population, would make it difficult for  
5 women to get basic hygiene products or make it  
6 embarrassing or even in some cases, simply fail to  
7 provide these necessities at all. Unfortunately in  
8 some places that is what has happened.  
9

10 As you have been hearing, the failure to  
11 provide easy and free access is both an attack on  
12 basic human dignity and leads to unacceptable  
13 outcomes; like health care, safe housing and food,  
14 [bell] this is a basic human right that should never  
15 be denied; never made difficult or embarrassing to  
16 access and for the vulnerable populations that we  
17 serve must never be dependant upon a woman's  
18 finances.

19 We also support Councilman Rodriguez's  
20 Reso 1012, calling to end sales taxes on feminine  
21 products, which we understand has been adopted in  
22 Albany; these basic health and hygiene products  
23 aren't a luxury and they should be treated as other  
24 basic health care products are, to be exempt from  
25 state sales taxes. Thank you all for your work in

1  
2 addressing this basic but important issue and  
3 righting this wrong.

4 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Thank you so much for  
5 your testimony and thank you so much for your service  
6 and all the work that you do for all of the women  
7 that you work with. Thank you very much.

8 NATHALIE INTERIANO: Hello. My name is  
9 Nathalie Interiano and I'm a Policy Associate at Care  
10 for the Homeless. Thank you all for allowing us to  
11 testify today.

12 We are proud to have been included in the  
13 roundtable discussions at Council Member Julissa  
14 Ferreras-Copeland's office last year where New York  
15 City advocates from many social service agencies  
16 spoke passionately about the negative health, social  
17 and psychological impacts that the lack of feminine  
18 hygiene products causes through many communities in  
19 our city.

20 Hearing that girls regularly miss school  
21 or that women resort to makeshift pad usage in  
22 prisons or shelters sheds light on the many obstacles  
23 women face due to the lack of access to property  
24 feminine hygiene and makes it impossible to ignore  
25 the urgency of the problem.

1  
2 Being able to maintain a hygiene routine  
3 is key to a person's own self-worth and value. As an  
4 organization serving homeless patients, our  
5 clinicians have seen homeless women who face not only  
6 loss of dignity from lack of access, but health  
7 problems, such as infections. For women experiencing  
8 homelessness, it can also mean minimal or no access  
9 to safe sanitary spaces, putting them in risky  
10 situations.

11 We as a roundtable also reflected on how  
12 this lack of access both cause and reinforces stigma  
13 around menstruation; having these conversations and  
14 increasing access is key to changing this culture; we  
15 as a city have an obligation to provide health care  
16 to all New Yorkers, especially the most vulnerable  
17 populations and this legislation is a considerable  
18 step in recognizing feminine hygiene as a basic  
19 health care need. Advancing health care issues for  
20 underserved populations is a cornerstone of the work  
21 that Care for the Homeless does and we thank that  
22 distinguished City Council Members are fighting for  
23 these important pieces of legislation that would not  
24 only improve access to feminine hygiene products to  
25

1  
2 many, but also indicate a profound and important  
3 change in the way that we view this issue.

4 We support this legislation because it is  
5 the right thing to do in order to advance the health  
6 care rights of all women.

7 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Thank you. Thank you  
8 so much for your service. Thank you. Next panelist.

9 BELKYS GARCIA: Hello. Thank you to the  
10 Committee on Women's Issue for the opportunity to  
11 speak today and for prioritizing this important  
12 issue.

13 My name is Belkys Garcia -- close -- I'm  
14 a Staff Attorney with The Legal Aid Society's Law  
15 Reform Unit. We strongly support the proposed  
16 revisions to the Administrative Code to require that  
17 feminine hygiene products are provided to women and  
18 girls in schools and homeless shelters and by the  
19 Department of Corrections to women in custody.

20 The Legal Aid Society is the nation's  
21 oldest and largest provider of legal services to low-  
22 income families and individuals; I've personally been  
23 with The Legal Aid Society for about 10 years, I  
24 started to work in the Bronx, which is New York's  
25 poorest county, helping people get access to public

1  
2 benefits, public assistance, food stamps; disability  
3 benefits. I then worked in the Health Law Unit,  
4 helping people access health care, such as sexual  
5 health and reproductive health and in that role I  
6 worked very closely with our Homeless Rights Project  
7 and our Educational Law Department. Many of my  
8 clients are living in very extreme poverty and they  
9 truly can't afford feminine hygiene products and it  
10 puts them in, as somebody said earlier, in a position  
11 of having to make very difficult choices about how to  
12 spend money on basic necessities, and the lack of --  
13 and as you know, these are not covered by Medicaid or  
14 food stamps or WIC. The lack of access to feminine  
15 products can prevent women from attending mandatory  
16 public assistance programs, which they need to do in  
17 order to keep their assistance benefits going and may  
18 prevent them from attending work or school  
19 activities, which is absurd.

20 Our Prisoners' Rights Project has or will  
21 be providing written testimony, which I don't have  
22 with me today, but my understanding; I have some  
23 basic points they would like for me to share; that we  
24 do, again, strongly support these amendments;  
25 specifically again, I think that what our clients

1  
2 have experienced do not match what the Department of  
3 Corrections had said earlier; it was our  
4 understanding that our clients are generally just  
5 provided with napkins and not tampons, so we  
6 appreciate the clarification in the amendments to  
7 expand the definition of these products, the product  
8 definition.

9 We would recommend that a revision be  
10 made to allow for three at a time to be provided as  
11 opposed to having people having to ask on a case by  
12 case basis as needed to really limit the amount of  
13 time that people need to engage with an offer to  
14 explain their needs.

15 And third, we are proposing an amendment  
16 that would ensure that these products are never  
17 withheld from women in custody, [background comment]  
18 [bell] which apparently has been done in other  
19 spaces. Thank you very much.

20 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Thank you. I just  
21 wanna add; we've been joined by Council Member Helen  
22 Rosenthal from Manhattan, who will, following the two  
23 panelists, will also make a statement and then we'll  
24 close our hearing for today. Thank you.

1  
2                   STEPHANIE GENDELL: Good afternoon. My  
3 name is Stephanie Gendell; I'm the Associate  
4 Executive Director for Policy and Advocacy at  
5 Citizens' Committee for Children.

6                   I want to thank both Council Members  
7 Cumbo and Rosenthal for being here, the Women's  
8 Issues Committee and all of the City Council Members  
9 and now in the state and the country who have really  
10 taken on this issue; it's of critical importance to  
11 young women and girls and older women as well.

12                   We are in full support of all three bills  
13 and the resolution; we believe that access to these  
14 products is critical and the implementation of these  
15 laws will be really important to watch. We ask that  
16 you consider either amending one of the bills or  
17 introducing a new bill to ensure that another group  
18 of very vulnerable young girls, young women have  
19 access to these products as well, which would be the  
20 girls who are actually in the custody of the City in  
21 foster care and juvenile justice through the  
22 Administration for Children's Services. I'm not  
23 trying to suggest that ACS and its providers are  
24 withholding these products from these young women,  
25 but I think as we think as a city about how to

1  
2 implement these new laws citywide and the  
3 implementation that we think about that if we have a  
4 bill for ACS too we'd be also thinking about how  
5 girls in foster care and girls in the juvenile  
6 justice system would also be able to have this  
7 access. So thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Thank you. Thank you  
9 so much for your testimony and the work that you do  
10 every day, you are a regular here, so we appreciate  
11 your work and your service [background comments]. I  
12 know it. Thank you.

13 DANIELLE CASTALDI-MICCA: Hi, thank you,  
14 Chairwoman Cumbo and to the committee for having us  
15 here today. My name is Danielle Castaldi-Micca; I'm  
16 the Director of Political and Government Affairs at  
17 the National Institute for Reproductive Health and  
18 our Campaign for a Pro-Choice New York.

19 As the name indicates, we work in New  
20 York State and across the country to ensure that  
21 every woman has the right and ability to make the  
22 reproductive health care decisions that are best for  
23 her life and her family and that includes preventing  
24 unintended pregnancy, bearing healthy children and  
25 choosing a safe, legal abortion. With that comes the

1  
2 flip side that women spend an average of three  
3 decades of their life preventing pregnancy and  
4 therefore typically experiencing about 30 years of  
5 menstruation, which is, you know, three to five days  
6 a month, month after month and uses a lot of these  
7 products in their lifetime and I have to say, I'm  
8 really thrilled that Congresswoman Meng was here and  
9 that we have people and strong women in our  
10 government working on this at every level; I think  
11 it's really thrilling to see.

12 We were very happy that the State took on  
13 the tampon tax, the euphemistically titled "tampon  
14 tax," and think that's a real important step forward  
15 towards economic equity, but I think the Council has  
16 recognized that removing that tax doesn't help the  
17 menstruating people who need assistance sort of the  
18 most and that these bills really do, and so we're  
19 really pleased to support all three of the pieces of  
20 legislation here today.

21 I would like to encourage the Council to  
22 consider slightly more inclusive language to ensure  
23 that all people who menstruate, including those who  
24 don't identify as female, have protections under  
25 these laws, and to avoid sort of repetition, I'll

1  
2 just say that we're in full support of all of these  
3 bills and thank you for taking them out [sic].

4 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Thank you so much.  
5 Thank you so much for your testimony. I wanna bring  
6 it to Council Member Helen Rosenthal, who has a  
7 statement that she would like to make, and then we'll  
8 begin to close.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Thank you so  
10 much, Chair Cumbo; thank you for holding this hearing  
11 and these bills are extraordinary.

12 First and foremost I'd like to attach my  
13 name to all of these bills, so I don't know the magic  
14 of how that's done, but... [crosstalk]

15 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Done.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Okay. Good.  
17 And I of course wanna thank the groups who are here  
18 today for testifying and whichever group came up with  
19 the tee shirt, The Future Is Female, really liking  
20 that, and also, thank you for helping me remember  
21 that 360 weeks of my life were spent... [interpose,  
22 background comment] thank you so much. These are  
23 incredibly powerful bills that will make the  
24 difference, I mean especially as you're describing  
25 people who are incarcerated, people in foster care,

1  
2 and you know, for the nonprofits that supply tampons  
3 and pads, this is part of the OTPS that is  
4 underfunded and if we fully funded OTPS, this is the  
5 kind of stuff that could be provided with ease. So  
6 just wanted to put that plug in there to anyone who's  
7 listening, and I wanna thank you so much again.

8 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Thank you. Thank  
9 you. I wanna thank you all for your testimony;  
10 today's been an extraordinary day; I wanna thank  
11 Chair Ferreras-Copeland as well as our Speaker,  
12 Melissa Mark-Viverito, all of the advocates, everyone  
13 that has testified today; this is extraordinary  
14 legislation and what I believe is so empowering about  
15 it is that it makes us whole women where we're able  
16 to discuss our whole selves instead of keeping so  
17 many aspects of ourselves hidden or a secret or taboo  
18 or inappropriate; I'm proud that we're part of a City  
19 Council that's been able to talk about issues around  
20 ovarian cancer, HPV, abortion, domestic violence, our  
21 menstrual cycles; that we're able to have these  
22 conversations in City Hall is really rocking, like  
23 we're really setting a new precedent and it's  
24 exciting for all of you to be here to experience it,  
25 to be a part of it and to be a driving force and I'm

1  
2 so pleased that Congresswoman Meng was able to be  
3 here today because her work on the federal level is  
4 going to have great implications, but to have dynamic  
5 women on the City, State and Federal level working on  
6 an issue, I think we've created a bit of a dream team  
7 here in terms of how we're going to get incredible  
8 legislation passed that impact women, that impact  
9 men, that impact families and we're going to  
10 certainly be a more equitable society. So I thank  
11 you all for your participation and everyone that has  
12 made this possible today and this hearing is  
13 adjourned.

14 [gavel]

15 [applause]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date June 28, 2016