

© 2021 CLAIRE COX. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits the user to copy, distribute, and transmit the work provided that the original author(s) and source are credited.

VOL. 41 SYMPOSIUM ESSAY: MENSTRUAL EQUITY ADVANCES IN GEORGIA

CLAIRE COX; ADELE STEWART

The following is a part of an essay series for the Volume 41 Symposium, "Are You There Law? It's Me, Menstruation."

In 2017, a Georgia STOMP coalition founding member organization posed eliminating the tax on menstrual products to their local Representative, a man. He supported eliminating the tax but said a woman should sponsor the bill. From the early days, before Georgia STOMP was even founded, one thing has been clear: we need to elect more women and ensure more male allies understand menstrual equity and period poverty.

Thankfully, our coalition was able to connect with women in the Georgia General Assembly, who heard the call of advocates and have worked to address issues of menstrual equity and period poverty. Georgia has seen bills and resolutions filed to eliminate the 4% state sales tax on menstrual products, research the need for menstrual products in schools, provide for education related to toxic shock syndrome, require products in restrooms of state-owned facilities and require that school districts provide products. However, progress in the legislature has been limited. Progress outside of the legislature is where the advocacy community obtained our most significant gains.

Georgia benefits from receptive state agencies, who modified administrative policies to great effect. In 2018, the Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency (GEMA) changed their policy governing the ability for state relief money to be used to purchase menstrual products following a conversation to explain the need. Work continues with GEMA to assure the supply chain of period products.

Coalition expansion and relationship building with the Departments of Public Health (DPH) and Education (DOE) led to a widespread understanding of Georgia's students' experiences with menstruation - which got the attention of state legislative leadership. Subsequently, the legislature allocated money for menstrual products in schools (\$1 million) and community health departments (\$500,000) in 2019. Following the budget allocations, Georgia STOMP supported distribution of these funds by partnering with the DOE and Georgia Association of School Nurses to distribute educational materials and host a webinar regarding best practices, which greatly increased awareness of the issue.

Following the passage of the First Step Act in 2018 and mounting pressure, the Department of Corrections adopted a new policy detailing the availability of menstrual products on a free and as-needed basis. Georgia STOMP corresponded with the Commissioner until the policy was

finalized and cabinets were installed in women's dorms. Surveys of incarcerated women have shown the improvements provided and the advocacy needs remaining.

Hard-won progress has been partially halted by the effects of COVID-19; budget allocations have been slashed and advocates are unable to further track implementation of policy in prisons and jails. These and other examples show how tenuous success is without policy to ground administrative changes.

We owe much to legislators, but even more to the community which responded with a tangible culture shift, so that period products are collected openly in the state capitol's rotunda, agencies open their doors to collaborations for the benefit of the people they serve, and media outlets in rural and urban areas cover product supply successes and challenges.

Keywords: law; menstruation; symposia; gender; Are You There Law? It's Me Menstruation