

March 8th, 2021

The Honourable Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education
5th Floor, 438 University Ave
Toronto, ON M5G 2K8

RE: JOINT STATEMENT ON PROMOTING MENSTRUAL EQUITY IN ONTARIO SCHOOLS

Dear Minister Lecce,

A report conducted by Plan International Canada found that one-third of Canadian women under the age of 25 say they've struggled to afford menstrual products. 83% say they feel their period prevents them from fully participating in activities, while 70% say they have missed school or work or have withdrawn from fully participating in social activities because of their period. We must also acknowledge that this data does not capture the experiences of trans men and gender non-binary people.

As members of society and government have begun looking and working towards a post-Covid society, it is critical that we ensure that each and every barrier that existed prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and that was exacerbated by the pandemic is no longer an impediment to the most vulnerable in society. Addressing this rising issue of period poverty – the inability to afford period products – is something that requires immediate action, and now.

When people who menstruate don't have access to the resources and information to manage their periods safely and with dignity, they are more likely to miss school and work, face higher health risks, and struggle to reach their full potential. There should be no stigma around something as fundamental as menstruation. Menstrual products are a necessity and not a luxury.

Every woman, girl, trans man and gender non-binary person should be able to focus on their education and be active participants without having to worry about inadequate access to tampons, pads, and other menstrual products. The lack of access to these products can negatively impact students' school attendance and their social-emotional well-being and have contributed to the stigma that exists on menstruation. Providing all students with convenient access to free menstrual products helps to support their full participation in school activities, reduces stigma and promotes gender equality.

We continue to see other jurisdictions and school districts in Canada take steps to fight period poverty. British Columbia, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island are provinces that provide free menstrual products to all students in their respective jurisdictions. We have also seen school boards in Ontario, such as the Toronto District School Board, Waterloo Region District School

Board, and most recently Ottawa-Carleton District School Board and Limestone District School Board take similar action.

That is why the Toronto Youth Cabinet and all underlying signatories are calling on the Province of Ontario and all 72 school boards to require free and accessible menstrual products in all publicly funded Ontario elementary and secondary schools. We are also asking that the Province of Ontario fully funds this initiative and ensures that it is in place by the end of 2021. These products must not only be free of charge, but be provided in ways that also protect privacy, are barrier free and easily accessible, are consistent in delivery and availability, and are non-stigmatizing. Additionally, we are asking that the province includes literacy on menstrual health into the Health and Physical Education curriculum as a mandatory education requirement.

The simple truth is that, for far too long we have ignored the issue about menstrual periods and that silence has hurt our young people. No young person should miss out on their education or feel stigmatized because of something that is a normal part of life for them.

Thank you Minister Lecce for your attention on this matter. We hope for immediate action on this. Let us continue to work towards making Ontario's publicly funded education system much stronger, more equitable and the best in the world!

CC: Premier of Ontario Doug Ford
Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues Jill Dunlop
Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions Michael A. Tibollo
Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Education Sam Oosterhoff
Leader, Official Opposition, Andrea Horwath
Education Critic, Marit Stiles
Women's Issues Critic, Jill Andrew

Sincerely,

1. Toronto Youth Cabinet (TYC)
2. People For Education
3. Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC)
4. Ontario Student Trustees Association (OSTA-AECO)
5. Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO)
6. Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association (OECTA)
7. Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation (OSSTF)
8. Association des enseignantes et des enseignantes franco-ontariens (AEFO)
9. The Period Purse
10. YWCA Ontario (Coalition of all Ontario YWCA's)
11. Bleed the North

