

2022 Legislative Proposal

Submitted by: Contra Costa County

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Topic: Stipends to Address Menstruation Equity

PROBLEM STATEMENT: In Contra Costa County and across the country, too many low-income women struggle to obtain menstrual hygiene products for themselves and their female children or dependent household members. A 2019 study by Obstetrics & Gynecology of low-income women in a large U.S. city found that nearly two-thirds (64%) could not afford menstrual hygiene products or supplies in the past year. The same study found that more than one in five (21%) women experienced this problem monthly¹.

The umbrella term “period poverty” describes inequities resulting from the lack of access to menstrual hygiene tools and resources. In addition to low-income women and girls, “period poverty” also adversely affects students, transgender and non-binary individuals, incarcerated women, and homeless women. Among the key contributors to “period poverty” are:

- Exorbitant prices of tampons or pads: 27 states* currently view these products as luxury goods and impose sales tax, also known as the “tampon tax,” on menstrual hygiene products.
 - Last year, menstrual products and diapers were permanently exempted from the retail tax through a budget bill, AB 150. See: https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=202120220AB150&search_keywords=menstrual+products
- Menstrual hygiene products cannot be purchased with Food Stamps (CalFresh in California), Medicaid (Medi-Cal in California), and the WIC program. Health savings accounts only recently allowed for the purchase of menstrual hygiene products due to the recent CARES Act.

Recent studies have found linkages between frequent instances of “period poverty” and the prevalence of health inequities. For example, a recent analysis of college-age women in the U.S. conducted by the National Library of Medicine found that women who experienced monthly period poverty over the past year were the most likely to report moderate/severe depression².

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

Research reveals that Assemblywoman Lorena Gonzalez carried a bill in 2018 that made \$30 in diaper assistance available in the CalWORKs Welfare to Work and Cal Learn programs. See: https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201720180AB480

In Illinois, House Bill 155 was recently signed into law and will take effect on January 1, 2022. House Bill 155 will require the Department of Human Services to apply for a waiver from the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Food and Nutrition Service permitting Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) benefit recipients to use their benefits to purchase diapers and menstrual hygiene products.

¹ [Unmet Menstrual Hygiene Needs Among Low-Income Women: Obstetrics & Gynecology \(lww.com\)](https://www.lww.com)

² [Period poverty and mental health implications among college-aged women in the United States - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/)

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PROPOSED SOLUTION: This proposal aims to help alleviate menstrual inequity through a stipend pilot program for CalWORKs Welfare-to-Work recipients. EHSD proposes a \$15 monthly stipend for all female, transgender, and non-binary WTW recipients between the ages of 11 solely to purchase feminine hygiene products. Stipend-eligible individuals shall receive the benefit monthly through the household's CalWORKs-issued EBT Card.

Modelled after the diaper stipend, EHSD proposes this pilot program as a way to cover an initial population of vulnerable individuals engaged in Welfare-to-Work, with the intent to expand the stipend to a broader population of vulnerable individuals in the future.

ANALYSIS

Potential Eligibles:

All active CalWORKs Welfare-to-Work (WTW) participants who are female, transgender, or non-binary, and between ages 11 and 55 shall be eligible for the stipend. Individuals experiencing program sanctions and ineligible household members shall not be eligible for the stipend. An analysis of the current active Contra Costa CalWORKs households in CalWIN reveals the following as of September 2021:

- There are **12,608 CalWORKs participants** in Contra Costa County which includes **1,809 individuals who are enrolled in Welfare-To-Work (WTW)**.
- There are **4,156 individuals enrolled in CalWORKs** who are females between the ages of 11-55, of which **1,363 individuals enrolled in WTW** are eligible for the stipend.

Contra Costa worked with CDSS to generate statewide estimates of the number of potentially eligible. CDSS estimates that as of September 2021, there may be approximately 43,000 WTW recipients statewide who are female, between the ages of 11-55, and are not sanctioned or excluded from WTW activities³.

POTENTIAL FISCAL IMPACT

Rough Estimates

Annual cost of the stipend are as follows:

- This proposal would allow **1,363 female, aged 11-55, non-exempt, non-sanctioned Contra Costa WTW participants to qualify to a monthly \$15 stipend** as a supportive service. This translates to an annual cost of $1,363 \times \$15 \times 12 = \mathbf{\$245,340}$ to cover eligible individuals in Contra Costa County.
- This proposal would allow 43,000 female, aged 11-55, non-exempt, non-sanctioned individuals statewide (per CDSS estimates) to qualify to a monthly \$15 stipend as a supportive service. This translates to an annual cost of $43,000 \times \$15 \times 12 = \mathbf{\$7.74 \text{ million}}$ to cover eligible individuals statewide.
- There is an approximate one-time cost of **\$800,000** for CalSAWS integration.

³ CDSS generated this estimate by pulling a Medi-Cal Eligibility Data System (MEDS) point-in-time extract of eligibility data as of the end of September 2021, and matching that with a Welfare Data Tracking Implementation Project (WDTIP) point-in-time extract from November 2021.

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In summary, this pilot stipend program may allow **more than 43,000 low-income females aged 11-55 statewide, which includes 1,300 vulnerable Contra Costa community members**, to benefit from a monthly stipend of \$15 per month based on the above estimates.

Transmission of Stipend:

Qualified individuals linked to an active CalWORKs case shall receive the monthly stipend through the listed Head of Household's EBT card. These costs may be recouped in other areas, such as lower utilization of public health resources (including mental health resources), an increase in overall health and well-being of individuals who experience menstruation, leading to positive outcomes.

POTENTIAL IMPACT TO OTHER COUNTY DEPARTMENTS OR SPECIFIC SUPERVISORIAL DISTRICTS

N/A

ANTICIPATED SUPPORT OR OPPOSITION

Anticipated Support:

- Other County Human Services Departments
- American Academy of Pediatrics, California
- American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, District IX
- Anti-Defamation League
- California Grocers Association
- CaliforniaHealth+ Advocates
- California Welfare Directors Association
- Courage Campaign
- End the Tampon Tax in California Grassroots Coalition
- Equal Rights Advocates
- IGNITE
- The Indie-Activists
- National Association of Social Workers, California Chapter
- National Women's Political Caucus of California
- Pad Project
- Sacramento Homeless Period Project
- Western Center on Law and Poverty
- Women's Empowerment
- Feeding America
- California Association of Food Banks
- California WIC Association

Anticipated Opposition:

N/A