

## Increasing Access to Menstrual Products in Prisons, Homeless Shelters, and Public Schools

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Amanda Lanciault (left) and Vishni Samaraweera

**H**.534/S.1381, An Act to increase access to disposable menstrual products, seeks to diminish the effects of period poverty.

The I AM Bill would increase access to disposable menstrual products across the states' schools, homeless shelters, and prisons. The bill intentionally uses inclusive language such as "menstruators" and ensures that the products will be distributed in a manner to eliminate stigma for those who use these products. The legislation hopes to equate period products with any other hygienic product offered in public settings, such as toilet paper or soap, and to destigmatize menstruation itself and open the door to further menstrual equity legislation in the future. While environmental and cost concerns have been raised from opponents, the legislation has historically popular support in the Massachusetts legislature and current representatives are optimistic that the 193rd Session will be the one to pass the I AM Bill.

### ■ The Bill

H.534/S.1381: An Act to increase access to disposable menstrual products

### ■ Elevator Speech

Good morning and thank you for your time. Our names are Vishni Samaraweera and Amanda Lanciault, and we are two Massachusetts voters and advocates who would like to speak with you about H.534/S.1381, or the I AM Bill, which aims to increase access to disposable menstrual products to menstruators across the state's schools, homeless shelters, and prisons. As menstruators and public health students, we believe that it is unacceptable that menstrual products are not offered equally to all citizens of Massachusetts.

Every day in our community, menstruators are forced to choose between necessary healthcare products and other essential items like food, housing, and clothes. Menstruation is a normal bodily function that many Massachusetts residents face, but period products are not treated as an essential item such as toilet paper or soap.

In 2019, I [Vishni] collaborated with students and town meeting members who are menstruators in my hometown of Brookline to pass legislation mandating period products be provided in the bathrooms of all K-12 public schools and public buildings in town. Current students say that this legislation has made them feel less ashamed about menstruation and at ease when they get their period.

The average menstruator spends between \$150-\$500 a year and uses between three to six menstrual products a day. However, Brookline's legislation demonstrates that with just an annual cost of \$2.95 a year per menstruator, this legislation will have a marginal cost to districts with immense benefits to the community. No one should have to go without products they need – but currently, the State of Massachusetts forces menstruators to make this decision over and over.

We encourage Massachusetts legislators to hold a hearing for the I AM Bill and allow menstruators to have equitable access to this fundamental health necessity.