

The Glengarry News

Periods Matter: South Glengarry considering making tampons and pads easier to access for girls and women

July 10 2018 BY TARA MACDONALD News Staff

At last week's council meeting, South Glengarry council members discussed the possibility of following London, Sarnia and St. Catharines City Council's lead by considering the possibility of providing free menstrual products in municipally-run facilities.

The motion - brought forward by Councillor Stephanie Jaworski – was well received by councillors in attendance who called for a staff report outlining the costs of vending machines offering free menstrual products in select public parks and recreation centres.

“I believe that they should be installed in all our recreational facilities, parks, et cetera. I also believe that they should be in our schools, I'm was happy to see Councillor Jaworski bring this forward and it is something we will certainly look into,” said South Glengarry Mayor Frank Prevost who hopes to see vending machines installed by the end of the summer.

As a father of three girls, Mayor Prevost understands the challenges young girls face. “I strongly feel that this is a great idea for them,” he said. “Girls can feel very uncomfortable at the beginning. This would make things a lot easier for them, knowing where they can go to be protected.”

Eliminating Period Poverty

While Council focused on the needs of girls and teenagers, period poverty is a serious issue affecting women in Canada.

A 2019 national survey of 2,000 women and girls (ages 14-55) and 1,000 men and boys (ages 14-55) conducted by Plan International Canada shed light on the social, emotional and financial impacts of menstruation.

According to the report, one-third of Canadian women under the age of 25 struggled to afford menstrual products. The results also showed that more than one in two Canadian girls and women have occasionally had to miss out on an activity because of their period and concerns about lack of access to menstrual hygiene products.

Menstruation is not a 'luxury'. Period.

Menstrual products are an essential part of a normal, public life for people with periods. Nevertheless, for almost 24 years, Canadian girls and women had to pay sales tax (HST/GST) on menstrual hygiene products as though they were a non-essential or 'luxury' item. During this time, women's groups and activists argued that the taxation of essential and necessary products used exclusively by women was unfair and discriminatory.

After years of petitioning the Government, women groups and activists across the country celebrated the passing of Bill C-282 - An Act to amend the Excise Tax Act (on feminine hygiene products). On July 1st, 2015, sales tax was finally removed from menstrual hygiene products.

A significant move towards 'period equity', Bill C-282 helped safe-guard the rights of girls and women in Canada and sent a clear message to the provinces.

Some provinces – such as British Columbia, Manitoba and Nova Scotia – had already taken abolished provincial tax on menstrual hygiene products. For others, the federal government’s decision sparked momentum to follow suit by exempting menstruation products from provincial sales tax.

Ontario Schools to Offer Free Tampons and Pads to Students

While British Columbia is set to become the first provincial government to offer free tampons and pads in women’s and universal washrooms in elementary, middle, and high schools by the end of this year, Ontario may not be far behind.

On May 28th, MPP Bhutila Karpoche for Parkdale-High Park, recognized Menstrual Health Day by tabling a private member’s bill to the Government of Ontario to provide free menstrual products to all Ontarians, starting with publicly-funded schools.

“Many people don’t think of period poverty as an issue here in Canada, when in fact there are many who struggle to access menstrual products which can cost anywhere from \$76 to \$153 per year,” said MPP Karpoche. “This may not seem like a lot of money, but for many it’s the difference between eating or buying necessary supplies.”

In her motion, MPP Karpoche argued that period poverty was both a health and social equity issue. “When people are unable to afford a consistent supply of products, they may resort to unhygienic solutions such as reusing or over-using products that can lead to an increase in the risks for reproductive tract infections,” she explained. “It also means missing school or work, missing participating in social activities and experiencing social isolation and also violence perpetrated against them.”

Over the past year, a number of school boards across Ontario have been taking steps to put an end to period poverty by offering free menstrual products – such as pads and tampons – at their facilities.

Earlier this year, the New Westminister School Board became the first school district in Ontario to provide free pads and tampons. They were soon followed by Thames Valley District School Board, and Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) which plans to make free menstrual products available across all its schools and alternative education centres by September.

According to the WRDSB’s website, “Not having access to products impacts not only a students’ education, as many do not attend school as a result, but also their well-being.” The Board went on to state that “Asking for products can cause anxiety and shame.”

A South Glengarry highschool teacher who asked to remain anonymous agreed: “Many young girls are afraid or uncomfortable asking their teacher for menstrual products but I’ve personally had three students this year come to me asking because they didn’t have and were in need.” The teacher went on to say that while the school office keeps a few products on hand, it’s difficult for students to discretely ask for help in front of other staff members or students. “I can only imagine how many other girls were in the same situation and in need but uncomfortable asking.”

Glen Nevis:

“Girls all have periods, so providing free sanitary products at public places is a good idea,” said Sally Phypers who has an 11 year old daughter. “In England, I have a friend who’s really involved in it. They have something called the Red Box Projects that provides free sanitary products to all

schools and public buildings. They were the ones that kickstarted it and now the Government will be providing free sanitary products in all schools in England from January 2020.”

Lancaster:

“We think it’s great because some girls are shy and maybe some only live with daddy and don’t want to ask dad to go buy some products for them,” said parents of three girls Marie-Pierre Bernier and Shawn Fowler from Lancaster who also pointed out that “there are single dads out there who might need a little help!”

Williamstown:

“I think it is a great idea!” said mother of three girls Emma Jane Cockings of Williamstown. “Mine are not quite at that age, one is possibly very close but I feel that it would be great for them and many other girls that use those kind of places,” she went on to say. “These types of things should be available to all. For people who don’t have the means to purchase them on a regular basis, they shouldn’t have to feel embarrassed if it happens in public and they aren’t prepared.”