

**UNISON Scotland Response to Consultation\* on Proposed 'Period Poverty' Bill by Monica Lennon MSP.**

[\\*http://www.parliament.scot/S5MembersBills/FINAL\\_Ending\\_Period\\_Poverty\\_consultation\\_document.pdf](http://www.parliament.scot/S5MembersBills/FINAL_Ending_Period_Poverty_consultation_document.pdf)

**Proposed Sanitary Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Bill**

<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/Bills/105765.aspx>

Our responses, below, are in italics. Not all questions are answered.

**Aim and approach**

**1. Which of the following best expresses your view of the proposed**

**Bill?**

*Fully supportive*

**Please explain the reasons for your response.**

*UNISON Scotland has a large number of women members on low incomes. We are fully supportive of this important proposed Bill.*

*We believe it is essential that all women and girls, but in particular those living in poverty, should have a right of free access to sanitary products. As Monica Lennon says in the consultation document:*

*"The majority of women and girls face an undue financial burden throughout the course of their lives, dealing with something which they cannot control...those who are struggling financially should not have to face a cost for looking after their essential health."*

*We believe the provision of free sanitary products in schools is long overdue and welcome the proposal also for a duty on all colleges and universities to provide free sanitary products in campus toilets.*

*Not having access to sanitary products for financial reasons can be life threatening. The consultation document shows that between 2006/7 and 2015/16 67 women in Scotland were admitted to hospital with toxic shock syndrome, which can be related to tampon use.*

*The indignity and health impact for girls and women who cannot afford any, or enough sanitary products for their own health needs is an appalling indictment of our society and its priorities. It is a disgraceful situation, that this Bill seeks to tackle. Monica Lennon is right to highlight that the Scottish Parliament Official Report shows only one prior mention of tampons, before her Member's Business debate in September 2016. This was about*

*sewage-related debris on beaches. Women's lives, women's daily experiences, have not been properly addressed. We welcome this Bill correcting that.*

*As UNISON's NEC member Kate Ramsden said in the STUC 2017 debate before the decision to support a motion on Period Poverty, it is shocking that access to sanitary products is an issue in the UK as well as in the developing world. Responding to a comment by Health Secretary Shona Robison that feminine hygiene is not a health issue, Kate Ramsden said:*

*"It is most definitely a health issue. What do women and girls do when they can't afford sanitary wear? Maybe not bark and leaves but most certainly other unsuitable materials, which can result in risk of serious and sometimes life-threatening infections."*

*"Shona Robison is simply wrong to say it's not a health issue because 'menstruation is normal.' Yes it is, but having the wherewithal to deal with it appropriately is entirely income dependent.*

*"This is a real concern for women who are homeless without access to money or sanitary products but it is also a concern for the many thousands of poor families already dependent on foodbanks to survive.*

*"It should not be about charity. It should not be about dropping off a packet of tampons or sanitary pads at your local foodbank every once in a while, though no doubt that would be very welcome meantime.*

*"It should be about a right for women and girls to access sanitary products whatever their means. It is about dignity and respect for all women."*

<http://www.unison-scotland.org/2017/04/25/stuc-backs-homeless-period-campaign-dignity-respect-women/>

## **Universal provision of sanitary products**

**2. Do you think a universal, card-based system (modelled on the C-card system for free condoms) would be an effective means of providing sanitary products for free to those who need them?**

Yes

**Please explain the reasons for your response.**

*This proposal makes sense for provision over and above the proposals for schools, colleges and universities.*

*We are open to other ideas too, but would be supportive of the C-card system, which works well for providing free condoms. It is important within that system or whichever one is selected, that there is the option for each individual to choose the sanitary product which best suits their needs, or preferences for environmentally friendly products. The range of products should therefore include towels, tampons, re-usable pads, menstrual cups etc.*

**3. Which of the following best expresses your view in relation to a cardbased system?**

The card should be available to anyone; card-holders should have

unlimited access to free sanitary products

***The card should be available to anyone; its use should be restricted***

***(e.g. by limiting the number of products that may be claimed each month)***

The card should be available only to those on low incomes or in receipt of benefits; card-holders should have unlimited access to free sanitary products

The card should be available only to those on low incomes or in receipt of benefits; its use should be restricted (e.g. by limiting the number of products that may be claimed each month)

There is no need for a card scheme

Other (please specify)

**Please explain the reasons for your response.**

*UNISON supports the principle of the Bill in creating a universal right of access to free sanitary products for everyone in Scotland. As the consultation states:*

*"While menstruation is predominately experienced by women and girls, it is also experienced by some trans people. Access to sanitary products should be made available to all those who menstruate, regardless of gender identity, and all approaches taken to improving access to sanitary products should be trans inclusive."*

*The card should be available to anyone, but it is reasonable to have a fair limit that must be generous enough to cover all circumstances, such as e.g. a woman with heavy periods, a mother collecting products for herself and her daughters etc., The system should also allow for access issues so that someone can collect a 'bulk' supply rather than have to make too frequent inconvenient and perhaps expensive journeys to collect what they need.*

**4. Do you have a view on which locations would be most suitable for dispensing free sanitary products (e.g. GP surgeries, pharmacies, community centres, health clinics)?**

*We are happy for health professionals and others involved to determine this, but provision should be wide enough that accessibility is as easy as possible across Scotland.*

**Schools, colleges and universities**

**5. Do you agree that there should be specific obligations on schools, colleges and universities to make sanitary products available for free**

**(via dispensers in toilets)?**

Yes

**Please explain the reasons for your response.**

*This is key in numerous ways, but particularly should help in health, attendance and attainment. Similarly, the provision in colleges and universities will also have important health and educational impacts. These will be important in tackling inequalities and will have a positive impact on dignity and wellbeing, as well as on the economy.*

Personal experience (questions 6 and 7 are for individual respondents only)

**Financial implications**

**8. Taking account of both costs and potential savings, what financial impact would you expect the proposed Bill to have on:**

**(a) Government and the public sector (e.g. local authorities, the NHS)**

*Some increase in cost*

**(b) Colleges and universities**

*Some increase in cost*

**(c) Businesses (including suppliers/retailers of sanitary products)**

*Broadly cost-neutral*

**(d) Individuals (including consumers of sanitary products)**

*Significant reduction in cost*

**Please explain the reasons for your response.**

**9. Are there ways in which the Bill could achieve its aim more costeffectively (e.g. by reducing costs or increasing savings)?**

**Equalities**

**10. What overall impact is the proposed Bill likely to have on equality, taking account of the following protected characteristics (under the Equality Act 2010): age, disability, gender re-assignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex, sexual orientation?**

*Positive*

**Please explain the reasons for your response.**

**11. In what ways could any negative impact of the Bill on equality be minimised or avoided?**

**Sustainability**

**12. Do you consider that the proposed bill can be delivered sustainably, i.e. without having likely future disproportionate economic, social and/or environmental impacts?**

Yes

**Please explain the reasons for your response.**

**General**

**13. Do you have any other comments or suggestions on the proposal?**

*We welcome the fact that the work of trade unions on period poverty is recognised in the consultation. UNISON Scotland, including our Women's Committee, will be strong supporters of the Bill and its aims.*