

Feminine hygiene products given for free at Brown University

September 6 2016, by Jennifer Mcdermott

Brown University students are returning to classes this semester to find free tampons and sanitary napkins in academic building bathrooms.

The students leading the initiative at the Ivy League school say the products are a necessity, not a luxury— an argument that's being made across the country in efforts to stop taxing feminine hygiene products.

The products will be available in women's, gender inclusive and men's bathrooms in nonresidential buildings. Students wanted to offer the products in all bathrooms to be inclusive of transgender people, said Viet Nguyen, president of the Undergraduate Council of Students.

Nguyen hopes to motivate other universities and student governments to take similar actions to address this issue of equity.

"Why aren't these products treated the same way as other products we hand out, like toilet paper?" he said. "It's a necessity, rather than a luxury, so Brown and other universities should treat them as such."

National Organization for Women President Terry O'Neill said that Brown University has taken a critical step toward ensuring that tampons and sanitary napkins are accessible to all who need them.

"Feminine hygiene products are not a luxury. They're as essential as toilet paper, just ask anyone who has ever struggled to obtain or afford them," she said in a statement. "Students' participation in school should

not be hindered by insufficient access to this basic necessity. Universities around the country should follow suit."

Some states and cities are ending their tax on tampons and other feminine hygiene products. State lawmakers in New York voted to repeal the tax this year.

"We were inspired by the conversation about this issue," Nguyen said.

Classes start Wednesday at Brown University. Yuzuka Akasaka, a junior at Brown, said menstruation has been "taboo."

"I think that if we can implement this project, that will add to this conversation and make it more of an accessible topic," she said.

Nguyen said he hopes the university will eventually take over and provide the products for free.

He emailed students Tuesday to announce the change.

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