

NYC lawmakers pass a novel requirement for free tampons

June 21 2016, by Jennifer Peltz

New York City is on track to become the nation's first city to require free tampons and sanitary pads in public schools, homeless shelters and jails after lawmakers approved the idea Tuesday amid a national discussion of the costs of having a period.

The proposal, which Democratic Mayor Bill de Blasio's administration supports, marks a new direction in activists' push to dismantle what they see as unfair financial barriers, especially sales tax, between women and needed sanitary products. New York state lawmakers voted last month to become the sixth state to do so.

City Councilwoman Julissa Ferreras-Copeland's proposal would make pads and tampons entirely [free](#) in restrooms that serve 300,000 schoolgirls, and it would guarantee the products' availability to 23,000 women in [homeless shelters](#) and add the force of law to jail standards about sanitary supplies.

Supporters say New York would be the nation's first city to make that the law in such a wide range of locales rather than leaving the issue to more changeable policy.

"They're as necessary as toilet paper," so they ought to be just as freely available, Ferreras-Copeland, a Democrat, said before Tuesday's 49-0 vote.

During the discussion, the council's female speaker waved a wrapped

tampon aloft in the spirit of bringing a once-taboo subject into the open. Even a male lawmaker who found the subject a bit uncomfortable praised the proposal.

It's unclear when the mayor will take up the measure, which would provide an estimated 2 million tampons and 3.5 million pads per year in shelters alone. Once dispensers are installed, it's expected to cost about \$2.5 million annually in the city's \$82 billion budget.

To some extent, schools, shelters and lockups in New York and elsewhere already provide the supplies for free, and the issue has started bubbling up in various lawmakers' chambers. The Dane County Board in Wisconsin, for instance, voted late last year to experiment with providing free tampons and pads in some buildings in the capital county. A Wisconsin state legislature proposal to require the products to be free in [public schools](#) and state buildings stalled this spring.

Advocates say the measure also would make the free sanitary supplies more readily available by putting them in school restrooms instead of at nurses' offices. Girls who need pads or tampons have to scramble to try to get to the nurse and then the restroom in breaks between classes, says Lineyah Mitchell, a graduating senior at Brooklyn Technical High School.

Rather than do that and risk being late, girls learn to "know the friend in that class who has extra pads," Mitchell, 17, said at a rally before the vote.

Homeless shelters and jails already provide free menstrual supplies on request, according to the city administration. Women's advocates suggest the supplies are inadequate, which the agencies rebuff.

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