



## **Menstrual Product Program Launches in Fall River Schools, Shelters and Community Centers**

*Leading feminist organization Mass NOW awarded \$150,000 Community Empowerment and Reinvestment Grant with partner nonprofits United Neighbors of Fall River and Love Your Menses*

Fall River, MA (February 3, 2022) — Leaders from the Massachusetts chapter of the National Organization for Women (Mass NOW) take a big step towards ending period poverty with the announcement of a \$150,000 grant from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development Community Empowerment and Reinvestment Grant Program to launch a Menstrual Product Distribution Program in the city of Fall River. Menstrual products will be provided for free in bathrooms at all middle and high schools, and a number of shelters and community centers in Fall River. This program is a partnership between Mass NOW, the Fall River Mayor's Office, United Neighbors of Fall River and the Coalition Against Period Poverty (CAPP), a coalition composed of 30+ agencies working since 2019 to address period poverty throughout Fall River. Boston based nonprofit Love Your Menses will expand their Menstrual Health Workshop program to hire and train local educators to facilitate workshops in both schools and community centers .

“By providing access to free, quality menstrual products to public school students, unhoused and low income people who menstruate, we are taking on issues of public health, economic inequality, educational equity, and gender equity all at once. We're grateful for this opportunity to interrupt cycles of shame and stigma surrounding menstruation, and meet the need of menstruators living in poverty,” says Mass NOW **Executive Director, Sasha Goodfriend**. “No one should have to choose between food, shelter or menstrual products. Period.”

“As a former educator, I know the tremendous impact this grant will have on improving the health, wellbeing and educational outcomes of our students,” said **Mayor Paul Coogan**. “This program couldn't come at a better time, as the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is still being felt by students and residents in Fall River. I thank Mass NOW and our local partners on the Coalition Against Period Poverty for their work on this grant, along with the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development for their repeated investment in Fall River.”

Fall River Public School Interim **Superintendent Maria Pontes**, “We are excited as a district to support our students in accessing free menstrual products. Our mission to combat inadequate access to these products will remove barriers for our students who have missed classes or school due to period poverty.”

Fall River Public Schools follows the lead of Cambridge Public Schools, Somerville Public Schools, Brookline Public Schools, and Boston Public Schools. In 2021 Rhode Island became the 11th state to pass legislation to ensure free access to menstrual products in schools. Five states have passed legislation to provide free menstrual products in prisons and this past August, Illinois passed legislation to provide free menstrual products in shelters.

The MA Menstrual Equity Coalition includes over 70 endorsing organizations and has been fighting since 2019 to pass the I AM bill (S.1445/H.2354), a bill co-written by Mass NOW and lead sponsors Representative Jay Livingstone, Representative Christine Barber & Senator Pat Jehlen, would require all Massachusetts public schools, prisons, and shelters to provide free, easily accessible menstrual products. The bill also contains language to ensure the products are truly accessible without stigmatizing the individual seeking them. In December 2021 the bill was reported favorably out of the Joint Public Health Committee and has now moved to the Senate Ways and Means Committee.



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***About Mass NOW:** Since 1968 Mass NOW has been advancing intersectional justice and feminist principles in the Commonwealth. Today, Mass NOW is still one of the leading multi-issue, multi-strategy feminist organizations in the Commonwealth. Mass NOW is a member-led organization, bringing together over three thousand members across the Commonwealth. Made up of three distinct branches, the Mass NOW Foundation, which works to educate the community about issues facing women and girls; Mass NOW Inc, which lobbies elected officials and community activists for legislation that supports equality; and the Mass NOW PAC, which works to get feminist candidates elected to help ensure a progressive and feminist legislature — this historic organization is pursuing equity, acting for justice, and building intersectional feminism in Massachusetts.*