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Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity
ACT Legislative Assembly
GPO Box 1020
Canberra ACT 2601

Via email: LACommitteeECCB@parliament.act.gov.au

Dear Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity Committee,

Inquiry into the Waste Management of Absorbent Hygiene Products

The ACT Council of Social Service (ACTCOSS) is pleased to provide a submission to the Inquiry into the Waste Management of Absorbent Hygiene Products. Broadly, ACTCOSS advocates that action on climate change and waste is a social justice issue.

Sustainable and ethical disposal of absorbent hygiene product waste is not only an environmentally significant endeavour but also of major consequence to several vulnerable populations. Appropriate waste management must be approached with sensitivity to the needs of people with disabilities, carers, parents, and caregivers.

In preparing this response ACTCOSS has been in contact with the ACT Disability, Aged Care Advocacy Service (ADACAS) to discuss the usage of absorbent hygiene products by community and care services, as well as social impacts of low-waste solutions. We would encourage the committee to seriously consider the roles of and properly consult with expert community organisations including ADACAS, Carers ACT and Advocacy for Inclusion (AFI).

To begin with, in considering the scope of this inquiry we note the wide variety of absorbent hygiene products used by community members including not only period products but also products such as nappies, and products used by people with continence issues. Consumers of absorbent hygiene products are of all ages and

demographics and include some people with disabilities, older people, and people with a variety of health issues.

Given the range of people who use or will at some point need to use absorbent hygiene products it's particularly important that the products do not become inaccessible nor unaffordable. Many people will use multiple absorbent hygiene products each day, so it is also imperative that these people are not unfairly disadvantaged by changes to the availability of such products.

We would also stress the importance of maintaining a variety of products given that for some people with disabilities products must meet very specific needs (e.g., product type, feel, period of usability etc). The ACT Government must ensure that action on climate change is fast, fair and inclusive, and centres the needs of marginalised or vulnerable people in Canberra.

The demographics of people who utilise absorbent hygiene products includes people on low incomes including disability pensioners, aged care pensioners and those on Jobseeker. Increases in cost for these products would have a very profound negative impact on these groups. For people living on income support, essential items are often already a major cost, and have already been exacerbated by rising cost of living in the Territory. These costs often fall to women because they are likely to use them but also because of the high proportion of women in unpaid caring roles and acting as primary caregivers.

Many people across the community, including women, transgender and gender diverse people need regular and sustainable access to absorbent hygiene products. ACTCOSS' submission into the [Inquiry into Period Products and Facilities \(Access\) Bill 2022](#) speaks to the high levels of period poverty in the ACT for people in vulnerable positions including those without stable housing and those experiencing family violence. [Period Pride's 2021 'Bloody Big Survey'](#) found that 15% of ACT respondents had been unable to afford period products at some point in their life, pointing to the urgency of ensuring that all members of the Canberra community have access to a range of necessary absorbent hygiene products.

The incidence of stigma and shame around the use of absorbent hygiene products is often already a barrier to access for these products for many people. Explicit focus on these products as 'wasteful' could increase the level of stigma consumers feel and could further contribute to a lack of dignity and poor health outcomes.

Many of the concerns raised above tie directly to the need for access to hygiene products in relation to the [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(CRPD\)](#). Restricting access to hygiene products through increased costs or otherwise would particularly impact on the rights to living independently and community inclusion, personal mobility, respect for privacy, adequate standard of living and social protection, and participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport.

We hope to see the committee meaningfully consider and consult with members of the community who need and rely on a wide variety of absorbent hygiene products including but not limited to people with disabilities, parents and caregivers, carers, and people with periods.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gemma Killen' in a cursive style.

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