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February 2, 2016

The Honorable Julián Castro  
Office of the Secretary  
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development  
451 7th Street S.W.  
Washington, DC 20410

Dear Secretary Castro:

I write today to urge you to include feminine hygiene products in the list of eligible costs for Homeless Assistance grants administered by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

Feminine hygiene products are a healthcare necessity for all women and girls; homeless women and girls in shelters face serious hygiene and health issues when they do not have access to these products. There are reports of homeless women and girls who “use rags or bleed through clothes until they throw out or get donated clothes” when they do not have access to appropriate hygiene items.<sup>i</sup> According to Dr. Mary Marfisee, program director of the UCLA Student Run Homeless Clinic, “many [homeless] women reuse pads or towels or clothes when they’re menstruating, which can lead to irritation and urinary tract infections.”<sup>ii</sup>

Feminine hygiene products should be included in all lists of basic necessities. In a recent Feeding America survey, individuals in all income groups indicated that feminine hygiene products fall in the category of “basic essentials.” Other items that fell in this same category included toilet paper, toothpaste, deodorant, laundry detergent, bath soap, disposable diapers, and shampoo. These items “cannot be foregone or easily substituted.”<sup>iii</sup>

Earlier this month, I wrote to Department of Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson to urge him to include feminine hygiene products in the list of “eligible costs” for homeless shelters to supply with funds provided in the Emergency Food and Shelter National Board Program (EFSP),

administered by his agency. On January 8, 2016, the National Board for the EFSP voted unanimously to approve this request. The next EFSP Responsibilities and Requirements Manual will include information on this change, and is expected to be disseminated in support of the Fiscal Year 2015 grant by April 2016.

HUD is the primary grantor for federal funds used to address homelessness in the United States. Homeless assistance providers will often provide homeless individuals with toiletries and other basic necessities in the context of their outreach activities. As such, HUD administers the following grant programs that allow funds to be used for toiletries and basic necessities:

- **Continuum of Care Program (CoC)**

The majority of CoC program funds are used to pay for transitional or permanent housing, but supportive services are also an eligible use of funds. “Supportive Services” are defined in statute to include “the provision of outreach services.”<sup>iv</sup> The interim regulations for the CoC program describe “component activities and services” of outreach services as, in part, “initial assessment; crisis counseling; addressing urgent physical needs, such as providing meals, blankets, clothes, or toiletries[.]”<sup>v</sup>

- **Rural Housing Stability Assistance Program (RHS)**

The proposed regulations are similar to those for the CoC program. The statute provides for outreach services as an eligible use of funds as a “Supportive Service.”<sup>vi</sup> The proposed regulations also state that outreach services include, “[a]ddressing urgent physical needs such as providing meals, blankets, clothes or toiletries[.]”<sup>vii</sup>

- **Emergency Solutions Grants Program (ESG)**

The ESG program focuses on emergency shelter and homelessness prevention. The statute lists as one of the eligible activities, “the provision of essential services related to emergency shelter or street outreach[.]”<sup>viii</sup> The regulations further describe street outreach to include “engagement” which involves a number of activities, including, “[t]he costs of activities to locate, identify, and build relationships with unsheltered homeless people and engage them for the purpose of providing immediate support, intervention, and connections with homeless assistance programs and/or mainstream social services and housing programs. These activities consist of making an initial assessment of needs and eligibility; providing crisis counseling; addressing urgent physical needs, such as providing meals, blankets, clothes, or toiletries[.]”<sup>ix</sup>

I ask that you review each of these programs to ensure that homeless assistance providers are able to use grant funds for feminine hygiene products. This would be a small, but necessary step

towards filling a necessary healthcare need for homeless women and girls. Thank you for your prompt consideration of this issue.

Sincerely,



Grace Meng  
Member of Congress

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<sup>i</sup> Sue Kerr; If You Can't Afford Tampons, What Do You Do?; (July 19, 2014); [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sue-kerr/if-you-cant-afford-tampons-what-do-you-do\\_b\\_5352396.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sue-kerr/if-you-cant-afford-tampons-what-do-you-do_b_5352396.html)

<sup>ii</sup> Nikki Somani; We Care Collects Feminine Hygiene Products for Homeless Women in Need; (March 5, 2015); <http://dailybruin.com/2015/03/05/we-care-collects-feminine-hygiene-products-for-homeless-women-in-need/>

<sup>iii</sup> In Short Supply: American Families Struggle to Secure Everyday Essentials; <http://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/our-research/in-short-supply/in-short-supply-executive.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> 42 U.S.C. § 11360(27)(E)

<sup>v</sup> 24 C.F.R. § 578.53(e)(13)

<sup>vi</sup> 42 U.S.C. § 11408(b)(1)(J)(i)

<sup>vii</sup> Department of Housing and Urban Development Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing: Rural Housing Stability Assistance Program and Revisions to the Definition of "Chronically Homeless", 78 Fed. Reg. 1,8749 (proposed March 27, 2013) (to be codified at 24 C.F.R. pt. 579).

<sup>viii</sup> 42 U.S.C. § 11374(a)(2)

<sup>ix</sup> 24 C.F.R. § 576.101(a)(1)