



## **Period Products (Free Provision) Bill**

Written submission to the Committee for Education  
7 January 2022

### **Introduction**

Children in Northern Ireland (CiNI) is the regional umbrella organisation for the children's sector providing policy, information, training, and participation services to our 150 members across Northern Ireland. We operate Parentline NI, a regional Parenting Support helpline offering advice, support and guidance to parents and carers. We work in partnership with others to achieve our vision of making Northern Ireland a society where all children are valued, treated fairly and are able to flourish.

CiNI welcome the opportunity to provide written evidence in support of the Period Products (Free Provision) Bill. Every child deserves equal opportunities to thrive and the Bill offers a progressive and practical call to positive action to ensure the universal provision of essential healthcare products for women and girls. The legislation builds on the positive steps already taken by the Government to address period poverty in education. Expectedly, the learning from existing initiatives will inform the roll out across all departments.

We commend Pat Catney MLA for introducing the Bill and the Education Committee for coordinating the Committee Stage. Clearly the composition and nature of the Bill is cross-cutting, requiring cooperation across Assembly Committees and cross-Government Departments, both in the development and application of the law. We welcome this joined-up approach.

### **Comments on the Bill**

We broadly support the principles of the Bill and agree with its three main policy objectives. In particular, we welcome the intent under Clause 1 that enables a parent or carer etc. to obtain free products for a child in their care (Clause 1(3)(a)); and obligations for the delivery of period products, which is an important measure for those who have mobility issues and live with a disability (Clause 1(3)(b)). We are pleased that these approaches have been taken.

The Bill gives the Department of Health discretion on the operational elements of the law but requires consultation on the proposed future arrangements, including where products should be obtainable; which types of products should be obtainable; and the ways in which free products should be obtainable (Clause 1(4)). This legislation is an important opportunity to destigmatise menstruation, deliver equal opportunity and period dignity for girls. Consultation on the arrangements is key to ensuring the most effective scheme possible and girls should be considered key agents in the design and delivery of it. Their feedback is vital in making the application of the law fit for purpose.

Clause 2 places a duty on each department of the Northern Ireland Executive to specify via regulations which of the public service bodies within its functions must make period products free of charge in its premises. Accordingly, '*public service body*' is defined as a body '*constituted by or under an enactment; having functions that consist of or include providing public services or otherwise serving the public interest*' (Clause 8). It is unclear if the scope of the legislation includes the provision of sanitary products within voluntary and community settings; and sports and leisure facilities, CiNI ask that the scope is explored and further defined.

We hope our comments are useful to the Committee. Please do not hesitate to contact [REDACTED] for additional information on anything raised in this response.