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Stellenbosch University Law Clinic fights tampon tax

2018-06-22 06:17

Christina Pitt



The Stellenbosch University (SU) Law Clinic has joined the fight to topple tampon tax and has made a written submission to National Treasury to include feminine hygiene products on the list of zero-rated VAT items.

The clinic conducted research on tampon tax shortly after the National Treasury called for public submissions for the expansion of the current list of zero-rated VAT items.

"The research indicates that the lack of access to feminine hygiene products, primarily as a result of the high prices of these products, is an enormous problem that confronts poor, vulnerable and marginalised women and girls in South Africa," SU Law Clinic attorney Monja Posthumus-Meyjes said.

"Because they can't afford this, they are forced to turn to alternative options that are mostly unhygienic and pose serious health risks."

Posthumus-Meyjes enlisted help from candidate attorney Danielle Louw and Erika Wright as well as Dr Lize Mills and Dr Silke de Lange of SU's Faculty of Law.

Girls could lose about 90 days of schooling a year

Their research focused on the impact that high prices of feminine products have on women who cannot afford it.

"The fact that many girls and women cannot afford proper sanitary hygiene products has further serious consequences in other aspects of their lives," Posthumus-Meyjes explained.

"About 30% of female [pupils] in South African schools do not attend school when they menstruate as they cannot afford sanitary hygiene products. This means that a girl could effectively lose about 90 days of schooling a year as a direct result of issues relating to menstruation."

The issue of tampon tax has come under the spotlight recently after MPs in Parliament insisted that that feminine hygiene products should be exempt from VAT or even be made freely available.

In 2004, Kenya became the first country in the world to abolish tampon tax. The Mauritian government similarly stopped adding VAT to sanitary pads and tampons in 2017.

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