



## Testimony in Response to the DHS Proposed Budget

*Submitted by Eric Mayo on behalf of Children's Home & Aid*

*March 10, 2022*

Good morning. I want to thank Senator Feigenholtz, Minority Spokesperson Curran, and other members of the committee for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Eric Mayo, and I am the Public Policy Manager at Children's Home & Aid. We are a statewide social services agency dedicated to advancing the well-being of children by investing in families to disrupt the systemic and multi-generational cycle of racial, social, and economic inequality. Many of the programs we offer are supported by DHS funds.

We are pleased the state has committed to 2 percent budget increases in several programs we offer, including Homeless Youth Services and Comprehensive Community Based Youth Services. The increased funding will help us to continue to provide quality services to many Illinois youth and their families. Today, we would like to offer comment on two issues not currently addressed in this budget: the rising cost of diapers and the lack of a funding increase to support home visiting programs.

### **Making Diapers More Affordable for Families**

Diapers are an integral part of our programming. In our Head Start and Early Head Start programs, we are required to provide diapers to children while they are in our programs. Our home visitors also provide diapers when needed, and our home visitors often travel with boxes of diapers or wipes in their vehicles in case families need them. Our two crisis nurseries in Bloomington and Rockford, distributed over 60,000 diapers and 2,000 packs of wipes in the first eleven months of 2021. This represents over \$75,000 worth of items. In Bloomington, we host an annual "Stuff the Bus" campaign, where the local community fills a large commuter bus with basic need items. This is in direct response to the needs of our families and others in the community who require this support now more than ever.

On average, families who struggle with diaper need are short 19 diapers each month.<sup>1</sup> For those of you who do not have children or have not had young children in a while, diapers are expensive; costing families anywhere from \$80-\$100 per month per child, and those costs are going up. From the end of 2019 to June 2021, the price of diapers rose 12 percent.<sup>2</sup> And that is before Huggies, Pampers, and Pull-Ups all announced additional price increases in the second half of last year. A 2014 report from the Center for Policy and Economic Research found that families in the lowest 20% of income with infants pay 14 percent of their income on diapers alone. This is 2 to 3 times more than the next 20 percent and fourteen times what the richest 20 percent of families pay for diapers.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Diaper Need and its Impact on U.S. Families." National Diaper Bank Network. Diaper-Need-and-Its-Impact-on-US-Families.pdf (nationaldiaperbanknetwork.org), pg 1

<sup>2</sup> Terlep, S. "Rising Diaper Prices Prompt States to Get Behind Push to Pay." The Wall Street Journal. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/states-getbehind-push-to-pay-for-diapers-11627045200>

<sup>3</sup> Cashman, Kevin. "Policies Like the Hygiene Assistance for Families of Infants and Toddlers Act Will Help the Poor Pay for Diapers." Center for Economic and Policy Research. <https://www.cepr.net/the-hygiene-assistance-for-families-of-infants-and-toddlers-act-will-help-the-poor-pay-for-diapers/>

The rising cost of diapers has many real-world impacts on children and their families. Diaper poverty is a serious issue experienced by approximately 1 in 3 parents nationally.<sup>4</sup> For these caregivers, many of whom are already balancing multiple basic living expenses, how to pay for diapers is yet another variable they need to factor in. Parents often know exactly how many diapers they have left for their child and this "diaper math" leads to added caregiver mental stress and impacts their well-being. Caregivers experiencing diaper poverty cannot afford to keep their child clean and dry, often stretching the time between diaper changes or using inadequate options as a substitute. These types of coping strategies can lead to irritation, prolonged diaper rash, UTIs, or even long-term health issues. Sometimes parents are forced to stay home from work because most early care and education centers require parents to provide the appropriate number of diapers per day for their child. Researchers found for every dollar of diaper aid a family was given, personal income for that family increased by 11 dollars. Even more remarkable, the analysis found that 1.3 jobs were created for every \$10,000 spent on diaper aid, a much better return on investment than your typical job creation program.<sup>5</sup>

We strongly urge you to include policies promoting diaper affordability into this year's DHS budget. As there are currently no dedicated public benefits for caregivers to afford diapers, one potential solution is a diaper allowance. Based on a similar program in California, and a soon to be enacted program in Washington, a diaper allowance would provide families with low incomes and young children a dedicated public benefit to help defray the cost of diapers. This simple solution would provide immediate relief to many Illinois families.

## **Support for Home Visiting Programs & Other Early Care Programs**

We, along with many other early care and education advocates, are asking for a 10 percent increase across the entire state's early care and education system. Aspects of our early care and education system are spread across different agencies and are at the mercy of different budget asks/priorities. The differences in budgets for these programs lead to disparities and further the gaps across our system. For example, ISBE included a 10% increase in funding for preschool, home visiting, and center-based programs through the Early Childhood Block Grant. On the other hand, DHS-funded home visiting programs, Parents Too Soon/Healthy Families, do not currently have an increase in appropriation and have not had an increase in many years.

We believe continued investment in these critical programs is needed to ensure that the young children in our state have access to high-quality early care and education services and families have the necessary support and resources to raise their children. A 10 percent increase to DHS-funded home visiting programs better aligns home visiting funding and removes wage disparities across the system and between the various models. Our home visiting programs cannot reach children and parents without appropriate staffing and, like many other early childhood programs, home visiting programs are experiencing a staffing crisis due to lower wages and the impacts of the pandemic. The 10 percent increase requested today by the early care and education advocate community can support adjustments to home visitor salaries and help recruit and retain quality home visitors.

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<sup>4</sup> See 1, pg 1

<sup>5</sup> Carstensen, Fred and Peter Gunther. "Better Health for Children and Increased Opportunities for Families: the Social and Economic Impacts of the Diaper Bank of Connecticut." <https://nationaldiaperbanknetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/The-Social-and-Economic-Impacts-of-the-Diaper-Bank-of-Connecticut.pdf>, pg 10

Through our work with the Illinois Pregnant and Parenting Youth in Care Home Visiting Pilot (IPPYC) and serving children and families involved in the child welfare system, we have seen the impact evidence-based home visiting programs can have on strengthening families. We know home visiting programs are proven to prevent negative childhood experiences such as abuse and neglect and can decrease the risk of substance use later in life (Baizer, 2018). Children and families involved in the child welfare system, including those receiving Intact Family Services, have unique needs. Our home visitors can provide individualized support to parents and work alongside case managers. Through the IPPYC pilot and Erikson DCFS Early Childhood Project, we are learning how to adapt evidence-based home visiting programs to support these families.

Additionally, we run one of the largest Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) agencies outside of Cook County. We process over 4,000 applications for the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) each month. We connect families to early care and education programs for their children, determine if they are eligible for child care assistance meeting their needs, and connect them with needed community resources. CCAP saw a cut to their general revenue fund last fiscal year and is continued through this fiscal year in the proposed budget. While CCAP received additional funds through federal dollars last year, that money will not last forever and additional funding should be fed into CCAP to appropriately support families in receiving the child care and community resources they need.

Thank you for your time and attention to these critical issues for Illinois families.