



Testimony in Response to the DHS Proposed Budget

Submitted by Ali Schoon on behalf of Children's Home & Aid

February 24, 2022

Good morning. I want to thank Chairwoman Lilly for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Ali Schoon, and I am a Policy Advocate 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 that the state has committed to 2 percent 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 one issue not currently addressed in this budget: the rising costs of diapers.

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 needs are short 19 diapers each month.¹ Some of that can be attributed to the rising cost of diapers. 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.² 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.³

The rising costs 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.⁴ For these caregivers, many of whom

¹ 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

² 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>

³ 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/>

⁴ See 1, pg 1

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.

Not only would a diaper allowance benefit infants and toddlers, but it will lead to positive economic benefits for families. 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.⁵ We strongly urge you to incorporate a diaper allowance into this year's DHS budget.

Under current law, there is no dedicated public benefit for caregivers to afford diapers. That is why we strongly support efforts that would create a diaper allowance for Illinois families. Modeled off a similar program in California, 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.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter, and I would be happy to answer any questions committee members may have.

⁵ 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