



## Testimony in Response to the DHS Proposed Budget

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

March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2023

Good morning. Thank you to Chairwoman Lilly, Vice-Chair Moeller, Minority Spokesman Weber, and committee members for the opportunity to submit testimony for this hearing. My name is Eric Mayo, and I am the Public Policy Manager at Children's Home & Aid. We are a statewide child and family services agency with range of services from child welfare to behavioral health to early care and education programs.

We are pleased the state is committing to an additional \$10 million for the Comprehensive Community Based Youth Services program, which we administer in ten counties in the Metro-East area. The additional funding will allow us to continue to help youth in crisis get the services and supports they need. I also commend the state's commitment to the early care and education with the Smart Start Illinois proposal. Access to high quality early childhood care and education programs is crucial, and this comprehensive investment in our youngest learners aligns with our mission to help ensure children, families, and communities thrive. We look forward to partnering with DHS to support a successful implementation of this proposal, including how to educate, train, hire and retain the workforce that will be essential to this expansion.

I would like to focus the remainder of my testimony on one issue not currently addressed in this budget and increasingly impacting families across the state and their ability to meet the needs of their children: the rising cost of diapers. Diapers are an integral part of our programming. In our Head Start and Early Head Start programs, we provide diapers to children while they are under our care. It is common to see our home visitor's vehicles loaded with diapers for when they visit with families. And we know that for families at risk of entering foster care, a lack of clean diapers and other basic needs can transform into a life altering family crisis. That's why we are on pace to distribute over 200,000 diapers this fiscal year statewide at our two crisis nurseries in Rockford and Bloomington, parent support, and early care and education programs.

Here are the facts on diaper insecurity: Approximately 1 in 3 parents nationally face challenges in affording enough diapers each month for their children. Infants and toddlers can go through up to 12 diapers per day, and families spend anywhere from \$70 to \$100 per month per child on diapers. Additionally, diapers are an ineligible purchase through SNAP or WIC. And this is all while diaper prices are rising rapidly. Since 2020, the price of diapers has risen by 30 percent, far outpacing inflation. Diapers are a necessity for families, but they are priced as a luxury.

I want to highlight three specific ways a lack of diapers impacts young children and their families. First, as I mentioned earlier, the Governor's Smart Start program is a historic investment in early childhood education that we are greatly appreciative of. However, many day care providers throughout the state require a family to provide diapers for their child. If those diapers are not provided, the child can't attend daycare, and the caregivers may have to make alternate childcare arrangements or skip work or school to care for their child. One study showed that for every dollar in diaper aid you provide a family, their personal income increases by \$11 for these reasons.

There are medical benefits as well. A lack of clean diapers is linked to an increase in diaper rash and urinary tract infections. Just by providing families with clean diapers, research shows that families can save up to \$1500 per year on medical costs.

Finally, we need to address the stress placed on caregivers of struggling to afford diapers. When someone asks, "How many diapers do you have?" the answer for a family facing diaper insecurity isn't a box here or a half a box there – it's 7, 5 even 3 diapers. And if you then ask when those diapers will run out, they can tell you the exact day or hour. But if something unexpected happens, that might mean a trip to the gas station or the local convenience store, where diapers are often the most expensive. This "diaper math" leads to added caregiver mental stress.

Legislation sponsored in this chamber by Representative Collins and in the Senate by Senator Villa would create an allowance specifically for qualified families with children under the age of three to purchase diapers. This commonsense solution, based on similar legislation in California and Washington, would provide families the resources they need to afford this basic need. We strongly urge the General Assembly to include funding for this program in the budget in alignment with the Governor's goals to make Illinois the best state to raise a family.

Thank you for your time in attention to this matter. Should you have any additional questions, I can be reached at [emayo@childrenshomeandaid.org](mailto:emayo@childrenshomeandaid.org) or 312-424-6872.