



Testimony in Support of HB1347

*Submitted by Jeannie Higdon on behalf of Children's Home & Aid
March 8th, 2023*

Good morning. My name is Jeannie Higdon, and I am a Program Manager at Children's Home & Aid. Children's Home & Aid is a statewide family services agency with programs ranging from early care and education programs to behavioral health services to child welfare programs. Our mission is to advance the well-being of children by investing in families to disrupt the systemic and multi-generational cycle of racial, social, and economic inequality. Thank you to Chairwoman Moeller, Vice Chair LaPointe, Minority Spokesperson Hammond, and the rest of the Human Services committee for allowing me to testify in support of HB1347, a critical piece of legislation for supporting parents of infants and toddlers throughout Illinois.

Why is Children's Home & Aid passionate about ending diaper need in Illinois? It is because we see the impact of families needing diapers every day. At our two crisis nurseries in Rockford and Bloomington I help manage, last fiscal year we collected and provided over 66,000 diapers to families in the community. This year we've already distributed 93,937 diapers with three months to go in the fiscal year. We also see it with families at risk of entering foster care, where a lack of clean diapers and other basic needs can transform into a life altering family crisis. Our home visitors see it, regularly driving to visit families with their trunks full of diapers. And we see it in our five early childhood care and education centers serving caregivers with limited incomes as they work to support their families.

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 for caregivers. And this is all while diaper prices are rising rapidly. A report this past July found a 20 percent increase in diaper prices over the past year. And a Wall Street Journal report from last year found diaper prices had increased 12 percent since the start of the pandemic. That's the price of an essential need for families, increasing in price by a third, over 3 years. Diapers are a necessity for families, but they are priced as a luxury.

Finally, I want to highlight the impact of not having enough diapers has on the families we serve. 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 – it's 7, 5 even 3 diapers. And parents faced with this diaper math can tell you the exact hour or day those diapers will run out. If their child gets sick, that means a trip to the gas station or local convenience store, where diapers are often the most expensive. If a caregiver doesn't

have enough diapers, they might use other household items as a substitute, leading to increased diaper rash or UTI's. They may not be able to send their child to child care, leading them to stay home, unable to work or go to school. This diaper math adds to the stress of caregiving and can lead to negative outcomes for the child and family.

Therefore, we are so incredibly grateful to be working with Representative Collins on HB1347, which creates an allowance for qualified families to purchase diapers. This benefit would impact up to 47,000 children throughout Illinois and make Illinois a national leader in addressing diaper need.

If we truly want to make Illinois the national leader in early childhood policy, addressing diaper need is a critical component of that conversation. Thank you for your time today and I strongly urge the committee to approve this bill.