



Testimony in Support of SB1294

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

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Good afternoon. My name is Eric Mayo, and I am the Public Policy 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 Gillespie, Vice Chair Morrison, Minority Spokesperson Syverson, and the rest of the Human Services Appropriations committee for allowing me to testify in support of SB1294, 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 its impact on families every day across all of our programs. At our two crisis nurseries in Rockford and Bloomington, last fiscal year we collected and provided over 66,000 diapers to families in the community. This year we've already distributed over 100,000 diapers with two 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. 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. This year, the Governor proposed a historic investment in early childhood education through the Smart Start Illinois program, an investment in which we are in full support. However, many early care and education providers throughout the state require a family to provide diapers for their child. If those diapers are not provided, the child cannot attend daycare, and caregivers 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, which if they are on Medicaid, could result in cost savings to the state.

Finally, I want to highlight the emotional impact 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. 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 Senator Villa on SB1294, which creates an allowance of \$70 per month per child three or under for families earning under 100% FPL to purchase diapers. This commonsense solution would impact over 100,000 children throughout Illinois and make Illinois a national leader in addressing diaper 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 today and I will happily answer any questions from the committee.