



## **Testimony in Response to the DHS Proposed Budget**

*Submitted by Eric Mayo on behalf of Brightpoint*

April 12<sup>th</sup>, 2024

Good morning. My name is Eric Mayo, and I am the Public Policy Manager at Brightpoint. Thank you to Chairwoman Lilly, Vice-Chair Moeller, Minority Spokesman Weber, and committee members for the opportunity to submit testimony for this hearing on the Department of Human Services proposed FY25 budget.

You may be more familiar with our prior name, Children's Home & Aid. Our new name, Brightpoint, signals our unwavering commitment to disrupt the systemic and multi-generational cycle of racial, social, and economic inequality by investing in families. This new identity is a recommitment to our partnership with families as the single greatest asset for child and youth well-being. This is because at Brightpoint, we believe that strong families create thriving children.

We are pleased the state is continuing its commitment to early care and education with additional investments in the Smart Start Illinois program including a \$5 million increase for home visiting. We encourage the committee to consider an additional increase to Early Intervention (EI) over the proposed \$6 million. EI is a critical program for infants and toddlers with developmental delays and additional investments, specifically for rate increases to support staff, are necessary for the program to serve the amount of children being referred. Access to high quality early childhood care and education 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 continued 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 how the state can better support families experiencing diaper insecurity. We are grateful that the Governor has recognized the important role diapers play in a young family's health and well-being by including \$1 million for a diaper program within the proposed FY25 budget. Diaper insecurity affects almost one out of every two families nationally and has a profound impact on the financial, physical, and emotional well-being of children



and their caregivers. I want to highlight just a few examples of these impacts, according to a recent survey from the National Diaper Bank Network:

- 28 percent of adults with diaper insecurity reported skipping meals themselves to conserve money for diapers.
- One in three caregivers report skipping other bills to afford diapers for their children
- 70 percent of caregivers said they felt stressed or anxious about their responsibilities as caregivers because of a lack of diapers.

I want to really emphasize that last result. When our staff speaks to families about diaper insecurity, we hear about the “diaper math” caregivers must calculate. When someone asks, “how many diapers do you have,” the answer for a family facing diaper insecurity isn’t a box here or half a box there – they will tell you exactly how many and the exact day or hour those diapers will run out. If there’s any change to that routine, like their children get sick, caregivers must figure out how they can stretch their diaper wearing until they can purchase more or figure out other alternatives. This can create tremendous stress and lead to overwhelmed caregivers who feel they have limited choices for how to provide for their child’s basic needs.

The need for diapers is only going to grow. Diapers are not an eligible purchase under SNAP or WIC, and it was reported over the summer that the price of diapers has increased by 32 percent since 2019. While diapers may be priced like a luxury, they are a necessity for families with young children throughout Illinois.

There is more the General Assembly can do this year to reduce the harmful impacts of diaper insecurity with additional investments in the DHS budget.. We know from conversations with parents and staff that one of the biggest pain points for families is how a lack of diapers can impact a family’s access to child care. Many child care providers require caregivers to supply the diapers necessary for their child while they are at child care and can be turned away from child care if they don’t have them. A 2023 study by the National Diaper Bank Network of caregivers experiencing diaper insecurity found **one in four avoided child care due to a lack of diapers**. This resulted on average in **five days of missed work or school per month**.



HB545, from Representative Mason, represents a smart, efficient way to reduce diaper insecurity utilizing our early childhood system. This legislation would require DHS to provide an add-on rate to CCAP providers specifically to purchase a supplementary supply of diapers to have available when families need them while their child is in child care. Providers would then no longer be allowed to turn away children due to a caregiver's inability to provide diapers. HB545 is a small change that can make a meaningful difference in reducing diaper insecurity in Illinois, and ensuring caregivers don't miss work or school due to a lack of diapers.

For many families, **a diaper is not just a diaper**. It is a costly item families must build their budget around while often sacrificing other necessities. It is a tangible symbol that caregivers use to gauge how well they are providing for their families. And it can be the key to ensuring a child can attend child care. HB545 is modest proposal that can supplement both the Governor's \$1 million diaper proposal and his multi-year efforts to transform the early care and education system through Smart Start Illinois. I strongly urge you to include this proposal with the House's budget request.

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