

Testimony in Support of HB545

Submitted by Eric Mayo on behalf of Brightpoint

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Good afternoon. My name is Eric Mayo, and I am the Public Policy Manager at Brightpoint. Thank you to Chairwoman Costa Howard, Vice Chair Du Buclet, Minority Spokesperson Reick, and the rest of the House Adoption & Child Welfare Committee for the opportunity to testify today on this critical piece of legislation.

At Brightpoint, we believe that strong families create thriving children. And children and families need access to basic needs like diapers to thrive. We are passionate about ending diaper insecurity in Illinois because we see the impact of families needing diapers every day across our programs. At our two crisis nurseries in Bloomington and Rockford, diapers are one of the most requested items by families. When our home visitors are going to homes, they are driving around with their trunks full of diapers to deliver to families. And while our six early childhood care and education centers provide diapers while the child is in our care through our Head Start/Early Head Start programming, we've recognized the need to partner with other community providers like diaper banks and food pantries to provide diapers when their children aren't at our centers.

According to a recent survey by the National Diaper Bank Network, diaper insecurity affects almost 1 out of every 2 families nationally and has a profound impact on the financial, physical, and emotional well-being of children and their caregivers. Just a few examples of impacts I want to highlight from that survey:

- 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.

Despite these impacts, **there are no direct state-level government benefits in place to allow caregivers who cannot otherwise afford them to access diapers.**

And the need is only going to grow: 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.

One area where we see these consequences play out is in our early care and education system. While the Child Care Assistance Program, or CCAP, helps families access affordable child care, families can still be turned away from their child care provider if the caregivers do not provide the necessary disposable diapers for their child. 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**.

The legislation proposed by Representative Mason seeks to solve this problem by requiring DHS to provide an add-on rate to CCAP providers specifically to purchase diapers to have available when families need them. 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 their local early childhood program. HB545 is a smart, efficient supplement to 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.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify. I'd be happy to answer any questions the committee may have.