

TESTIMONY OF Dr. Megan V. Smith
Appropriations Committee
March 3, 2021

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony to Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Dr. Megan Smith. I live in Madison, Connecticut, and I am currently a researcher in maternal and child health and an elected member of the Connecticut Academy of Science and Engineering, where we are charged with providing unbiased advice on science related issues to state government and other Connecticut institutions. Thank you for the opportunity to share testimony with you this morning to urge your support for The Diaper Bank of Connecticut, which provides critical support to families in Connecticut. I would argue the support that the Diaper Bank of Connecticut provides the type of support to Connecticut families that is firmly grounded in what we know the science tells us about supporting childhood wellbeing and reducing childhood adversity.

Through my research on women's mental health, I have become acutely aware of the critical importance of diapers to the mental health of new mothers. In our work in New Haven, we found that diaper need, was the number one predictor of postpartum depressive symptoms in a group of over 200 mothers. Nationally, we have examined data that show that diaper need is related to increased pediatric visits for diaper dermatitis (commonly called diaper rash). Other literature suggests urinary tract infections are linked to diaper need and to high Medicaid costs. Qualitatively, we hear again and again from low-income mothers that they would like to make their baby proud, they would like to be "good" mothers and provide all they can for their babies. We also hear how mothers struggle when their baby is crying and all they can do to soothe a baby is hug a baby, sing to a baby feed a baby, but sometime that one thing a baby needs to be soothed is a diaper change. When a mother cannot change the babies diaper as often as she would like, it prevents the mother from bonding and attaching to the baby in a way that fosters not only a mother's wellbeing, but also a child's development and growth. Diaper need also increases a mother's stress level and reduces her sense of competency as a parent. In this way, a diaper becomes a key link to maternal and child health. Finally, I cannot imagine a more critical time to support the Diaper Bank of Connecticut. National data and data from other researchers demonstrate a three to five-fold increase in maternal depression and anxiety as a result of the pandemic. Parents have never been more stressed, especially low-income parents. This stress deeply impacts child wellbeing and development. We have a key tool in reducing parenting stress in the support of the Diaper Bank of Connecticut.

I urge you to support the Diaper Bank in its efforts to address diaper need in Connecticut and by doing so, in promoting maternal and child wellness across our State.

Yours,

Dr. Megan V. Smith
62 Shorelands Drive
Madison, CT 06443
(617) 794-8947