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**Testimony Regarding H.B. 6439 An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium
Ending June Thirtieth 2023 and Making Appropriations Therefor
Janet Stolfi Alfano, MSW
Appropriations Committee
March 3, 2021**

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Representative Dathan, Representative Nolan, and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Janet Stolfi Alfano and I serve as the Executive Director of The Diaper Bank of Connecticut, a statewide, nonprofit organization that provides diapers and other basic health and hygiene items such as period supplies and incontinence products, to families in need in Connecticut.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding the Governor's proposed budget for the Department of Social Services and I urge you to **restore full funding to The Diaper Bank of Connecticut.**

A year into the COVID-19 pandemic that has caused so much despair and hardship, the most vulnerable victims continue to be infants and toddlers. Prior to the pandemic, one in three Connecticut families struggled to afford an adequate supply of diapers for their children. This works out to about **35,000 infants and toddlers** who experienced diaper need in our state *before the pandemic*. And the need has grown exponentially over the past year.

Across our state, parents and caregivers are being forced to make unthinkable choices: whether to buy diapers for their babies or pay for other necessities, like food, rent, utilities and transportation. No one should have to make these gut-wrenching decisions, but too many in Connecticut do.

Against this backdrop, Gov. Ned Lamont's proposed state budget aims to reduce The Diaper Bank of Connecticut's funding in half. We currently receive \$333,000 annually in state funding - not nearly enough to meet the need in our state - and the governor's proposal to strip \$167,000 away would have immediate, detrimental impacts on Connecticut families.

The Diaper Bank of Connecticut shifted into overdrive as soon as the pandemic hit. Diapers are a basic health need, and we are distributing an average of 75,000 diapers each week, which reach families who need them most through our network of community partners.

But even as we continue to expand our distribution capacity, we know it is not enough. We could distribute **five times** as many diapers and still not meet the need in our community. At this time, when so many are struggling, particularly low-income families that have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic, **we need more funding**, not less.

A recent study in the Journal of Pediatrics¹ found that diaper need is associated with increased pediatric care use. Babies who lack access to clean diapers are at higher risk for severe diaper rash, urinary tract infections and other conditions that require medical attention. When these occur, caregivers must take time off work and arrange for transportation to take their children to the doctor. These medical services put further financial strain on household budgets, as well as on the broader healthcare system.

Getting diapers to families that need them is the right thing to do. We serve low-income families which earn less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level; that is less than \$52,000 a year for a family of four. In most cases, our recipients work - sometimes multiple jobs - but simply cannot stretch their limited income to cover all their basic needs. Diapers can cost up to \$100 per month. Families that have no choice but to buy them from local convenience stores, rather than discount clubs or big-box retailers, often pay a higher premium for them.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (**SNAP**) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (**WIC**) **do not cover the cost of diapers**; they were not designed to. The only federal funds allowed for the purchase of diapers are through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, but those funds typically are quickly eaten up by other necessities.

The state needs to step in to help these families.

Aside from being the right thing to do, increasing state funding for diapers also makes smart financial sense. The Diaper Bank's infrastructure and longstanding partnerships with community agencies make our **organization the most efficient and cost-effective way** to get diapers to those in need. We buy diapers in bulk by the truckload, resulting in *up to a 50% savings vs. retail*. There are many interests competing for state dollars these days but allocating funds for diapers pays long-term dividends.

Many families that receive free diapers through our distribution network just need our help for a little while. A mother, for instance, might need diapers for a month or two, to help her through a rough patch until she is back on more solid ground. Without those diapers, she cannot send her baby to childcare, which means she cannot attend work or school. In addition to taking a huge mental and emotional toll, that will make it harder for her to break the cycle of poverty.

If we can get that mom the diapers she needs, alleviating that one burden for her, it can have an instant, meaningful impact. With those diapers she is more likely to get back on her feet, hopefully to a place where she is financially self-sufficient and less reliant on other public programs. Her baby, meanwhile, will be healthier, happier, and benefit from a stronger mother-child bond.

An adequate supply of diapers also *reduces babies' chances of developing diaper rash, urinary tract infections and other medical problems*.² Providing diapers now prevents future need - and expense - further down the road, all while helping parents provide a more stable environment for the children.

But all this takes funding. Without additional money to buy more diapers, we will never meet the need in Connecticut. A funding cut to The Diaper Bank would have catastrophic effects on our ability to get diapers into caregivers' hands. We run the risk of more families and individuals losing their financial footing and becoming trapped in a cycle of poverty.

Now is not the time for the state to turn its back on its most vulnerable citizens, infants and toddlers who deserve access to basic health needs.

¹ Sobowale K, Clayton A, Smith MV. Diaper Need Is Associated with Pediatric Care Use: An Analysis of a Nationally Representative Sample of Parents of Young Children. J Pediatr. 2021 Mar;230:146-151. doi: 10.1016/j.jpeds.2020.10.061. Epub 2020 Oct 29. PMID: 33130154.

² Cartensen, F. Gunther, P. Better Health for Children and Increased Opportunities for Families: The Social and Economic Impacts of The Diaper Bank of Connecticut. March 2018. The Diaper Bank of Connecticut, Inc. <https://www.thediaperbank.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Carstensen-Report.pdf>

Quick Facts

- 35,000 CT children aged 0-3 have diaper need (pre-pandemic)
- SNAP & WIC do not cover the cost of diapers.
- It would cost over \$3 million just to purchase diapers to provide a supplement of 50 diapers per child per month (about ¼ of the supply needed to adequately diaper a child) to those 35,000 infants and toddlers at our reduced cost.
- Our ability to purchase diapers in bulk, by the truckload reduces cost up to 50% over retail.
- A steady supply of diapers is required to bring children to childcare.
- Providing diapers reduces health expenditures by preventing diaper rash and related ailments.
- Legislators approved \$500,000 per year which was reduced to \$333,333 by the governor prior to the contract being enacted in the FY 2020/2021 budget.
- Governor Lamont's FY 2022/2023 budget further reduces our allocation by \$168,000 which would have a devastating impact on families during a crisis.
- We work with 60+ organizations serving low-income families across the state.

Our Partners

Access Community Action Agency - Danielson
Access Community Action Agency - Willimantic
ACES Head Start Services-Middletown
Alliance for Community Empowerment, Inc.-Bridgeport
All Our Kin, Inc.-New Haven
Birthright of Greater Meriden, Inc
Bloomfield/Laurel Family Resource Center
Branford Family Resource Center
Brennan Rogers Family Resource Center-New Haven
Bridgeport Parent Aide
Catholic Charities Centro San Jose-New Haven
Charter Oak Health Center (DDN) Hartford
Child & Family Guidance Center of Bridgeport
Christian Community Action, Inc.-New Haven
Clifford Beers Clinic (DDN) New Haven
Community Action Agency of New Haven, Inc
Cornell Scott Hill Health Center-New Haven
Cornerstone Foundation-Vernon
Dunbar School Family Resource Center-Bridgeport
East Hartford Family Resource Centers
East Haven Family Resource Center
Family Centered Services of CT, Inc.-New Haven
Family Life Education-Hartford
Hartford Healthcare at Home-Wethersfield
Hartford Maternal Infant Outreach Program
Hill Central School Family Resource Center-New Haven
Inspired Communities Inc-New Haven, CT
Interfaith Volunteer Care Givers of Greater New Haven
IRIS - Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services -New Haven
Junta For Progressive Action -New Haven
Keefe Community Center / Town of Hamden Community Services
LifeBridge Community Services-Bridgeport
Lulac Head Start, Inc.-New Haven
Malta House of CT, Inc.-Norwalk
Middlesex Hospital Early Head Start
Middlesex Hospital Family Advocacy
Middletown Adult Education Even Start Family Learning & Board of Education
Middletown Family Wellness Center Inc. CHC

Mid-Fairfield Child Guidance Center-Norwalk
Minding The Baby -West Haven
Minding The Baby - YNHH -New Haven
Montessori School on Edgewood, Inc.-New Haven
Morning Glory Infant Toddler Center -New Haven
Mt. Bethel Missionary Baptist Church-New Haven
New Britain Family Wellness Center CHC -New Britain
New Haven Healthy Start at CFGNH-New Haven
New Haven Housing Authority/Elm City Communities
New Reach, Inc.-New Haven
Project M.O.R.E. Inc.-New Haven
R'Kids Inc-New Haven
Reliant Behavioral Health & Community Services -New Haven
Second Star of Jacob-New Haven
Shiloh Baptist Church - Hartford
Southside Family Center-Hartford
St. Francis Hospital/Hartford
St. Luke's Episcopal Church-New Haven
TEAM Inc. Ansonia
TEAM Inc. Derby
TEAM Inc. Slocum EHS Waterbury
Thames Valley Council for Community Action, Inc.-Norwich
The Salvation Army-New Haven
W. C. H. S. Student Parenting Services, Inc-New Haven
West Haven Child Development Center, Inc.
West Haven Community House Head Start
Wexler Grant Family Resource Center-New Haven
Women Against Mass Incarceration, Inc.-Bridgeport
Youth Continuum, Inc. -New Haven