

Human Services Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5368

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING MEDICAID COVERAGE OF DIAPERS.

Vote Date: 3/19/2024

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute Change of Reference to Appropriations

PH Date: 3/7/2024

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Human Services Committee

CO-SPONSORS OF BILL:

Rep. Josh Elliott, 88th Dist.

Rep. Susan Johnson, 49th Dist.

Rep. Gary Turco, 27th Dist.

Sen. Julie Kushner, 24th Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

Affording an adequate supply of diapers can cause a significant burden on low-income families. The cost of disposable diapers can range from \$72 to over \$100 per month with an additional burden added if the child requires more frequent diaper changes due to diaper dermatitis, urinary tract infections, or other serious health conditions. Expanding Medicaid coverage to cover medically necessary diapers from birth to three can have positive impacts that reach beyond the child and their family. In addition to improving the health of the child in diapers, reducing diaper insecurity can help improve maternal mental health, where diaper need is noted as one of the biggest stressors. Addressing diaper needs can also help the greater community. Expanding Medicaid coverage to include diapers from birth to three not only alleviates the financial strain on low-income families but also fosters healthier outcomes for children, improves maternal mental health, and supports workforce participation, benefiting the entire community.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

The substitute language requires diaper dermatitis to be "severe, persistent" for Medicaid coverage.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Connecticut General Assembly, Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity; supports this bill as it is an important step in ensuring equitable access to essential resources for Connecticut's families and is a way to address social injustices across the state. It is stated that according to the NDBN Diaper Check 2023, diaper insecurity report about one in four parents or caregivers had to miss work because they did not have enough diapers to drop their child off at daycare or other childcare, missing about five days of work in the previous 30 days. It is stated that the inability to access diapers extends beyond diapers as well.

Department of Social Services, Deputy Commissioner, Shantelle Varrs; opposes this bill stating the anticipated significant cost and the funding is not included in the Governor's budget. It is stated DSS currently provides coverage of diapers for children three and older when there is a medical necessity in the management of incontinence and based on the individual need. It is also stated that DSS also provides coverage of diapers for individuals 21 and under who meet the definition of medical necessity on a case-by-case basis. It is stated that DSS is concerned that if this bill passes, they will not be eligible for federal match based on current guidance from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). It is stated that the current Governor's budget does include \$700,000 in annual funding for diapers for low-income families.

State of Connecticut, Comptroller, Sean Scanlon; supports this bill stating it will positively impact the health and development of infants in Connecticut but will also contribute to the economic stability, security, and independence of many women, caregivers, and their families.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut, Policy Counsel, Jess Zaccagnino; supports this bill stating the cost of diapers has gone up, with a box of 200 Pampers going from \$25 to \$40 for a box of 168 diapers. It is stated the increasing cost of diapers will impact low-income households, which are disproportionately families of color. It is stated expanding Medicaid coverage of diapers will improve the health, economic, and educational outcomes for these families. It is also stated that with more access to diapers, children are more likely to miss fewer days of childcare due to lack of sufficient diapers or illness and parents are less likely to miss work to care for their child. It is stated with the immediate benefit to the family, increased access to diapers can positively impact the greater community.

Connecticut American Academy of Pediatrics Chapter, Advocacy Committee Chair, Dr. Molly Markowitz MD FAAP; supports this bill stating expanding Medicaid coverage of diapers will benefit Connecticut's children. It is stated that a study in New Haven in 2013 showed that 30% of families reported needing help paying for diapers, and this data is consistent with a 2017 study that showed 36% of families reported diaper needs nationally. It is stated that addressing diaper needs can help address conditions such as diaper dermatitis and urinary tract infections, as well as potentially alleviate a cause of maternal depression.

Connecticut Children's Medical Center (CCMC), Office for Community Child Health, Community Relations Manager, Luis Rivera; supports this bill stating that about one-third

of Connecticut families with young children struggle to afford diapers. It is stated that CCMC participates in the Diaper Connections program where they partner with two Salvation Army locations to distribute diapers to families in need, up to 100 diapers per child per month. It is stated there is a great need for assistance as more than four in ten children live in households facing financial hardship according to the ALICE report.

Connecticut Citizen Action Group, Natasha Kuranko; supports this bill stating addressing diaper needs is crucial to improving the health and development of Connecticut's children. It is stated that expanding Medicaid coverage of diapers can help alleviate the financial strain on families due to the cost of diapers and also allow parents to work while their children are enrolled in early childhood programs.

Connecticut Early Child Alliance, Executive Director, Merrill Gay; supports this bill stating that expanding Medicaid coverage of diapers to include infants and toddlers will help their health and development as well as have greater impacts on the communities in which they live. It is stated the impacts on children include a decrease in diseases and infections associated with infrequent diaper changes and stay in early education programs. It is also stated that the impact on families can include parents missing fewer days of work, and fewer doctors' appointments for their children. It is stated for the wider community, that reducing diaper need has the potential to reduce costs to Medicaid through reduced visits to the emergency room.

Connecticut Hospital Association; supports this bill because addressing diaper needs supports a universal goal of advancing economic mobility, and reducing racial and ethnic health disparities in access and outcomes. It is stated that in addition to helping the impacted children, increasing access to diapers can also help with maternal mental health, where diaper need has been identified as the number one stressor and risk factor for postpartum depression. It is stated that this bill will enable diaper banks and other community organizations to direct their support to individuals for whom diapers are not medically necessary and families that are not eligible for public assistance.

Connecticut Maternal and Child Health Coalition, Maternal and Child Health Consultant, Marijane Carey; supports this bill stating it has the potential to increase access to infant and toddler diapers for families across Connecticut and can be a lifeline to families facing insecurities in their basic needs. It is stated the lack of adequate access to diapers impacts the health and development of infants and toddlers, increases stress levels impacts the mental health of caregivers, and impacts the ability of communities to maximize economic health.

The Diaper Bank of Connecticut, Chief Executive Officer, Janet Stolfi Alfano; supports this bill stating it would extend Medicaid coverage of diapers to children from birth to three who are deemed to have a medical necessity for diapers as determined by a medical professional (Doctor, Physician Assistant, APRN). It is stated that The Diaper Bank of Connecticut is one of the largest diaper banks in the United States but is only meeting a small portion of the overall need in the state.

The Diaper Bank of Connecticut, Advocacy and Outreach Coordinator, Jenny Kohl; supports this bill stating the inability to afford diapers impacts the health and well-being of the whole family. It is stated that parents and caregivers who struggle to afford diapers missed

between four and 5 days of work per month, missing out on about \$6,000 based on the current minimum wage. It is stated that The Diaper Bank of Connecticut serves about 7% of the diaper needs in the state. It is also stated that by expanding Medicaid coverage to include diapers, The Diaper Bank would be able to reach families that are outside Medicaid eligibility.

The Diaper Bank of Connecticut, Development Manager, Kimberly Spainer; supports this bill stating that providing diapers to families improves the overall health of the baby, improves maternal mental health, and improves family dynamics.

Fairfield County's Community Foundation, President and CEO, Mendi Blue Paca; supports this bill stating that by expanding Medicaid to cover medically necessary diapers from birth to three, more infants will be able to enroll in early childhood education programs and parents will be able to work more, benefitting the entire community.

Laurel Family Resource Center, Director, Gail Nolan; supports this bill as it helps The Diaper Bank of Connecticut to continue to provide diapers to Family Resource Centers to help individuals in their community. It is stated that the Laurel Family Resource Center currently assists 100 families per month because of distribution from The Diaper Bank of Connecticut. It is stated that expanding funding for The Diaper Bank of Connecticut will help it expand beyond its current reach of 8,000 families across the state.

Mothers for Others, Co-Presidents, Karen Giannuzzi and Cathy de Graaff; support this bill stating that Mothers for Others is the largest diaper bank in southern Fairfield County, distributing over 210,000 diapers in 2023. It is stated that on average, the cost of diapers is \$1,000 per child per year, leaving families making less than \$30,000 per year with multiple children spending a sizable amount of their income on diapers alone. It is stated additional support is crucial to continuing to help families keep their children dry, happy, and healthy.

National Diaper Bank, Director of Government Relations, Lacey Gero; supports this bill stating it can help address diaper needs in Connecticut. In 2022, diaper banks throughout Connecticut distributed more than 4.4 million diapers and that is only meeting part of the need. It is also stated that an adequate monthly supply of diapers can cost between \$72 and \$100 depending on the location the person is buying them in. It is stated that the Center for Economic Policy Research estimates that the poorest fifth of U.S. families spend almost 14% of their post-tax income on diapers. It is also stated that many childcare centers require families to provide a full day or a full week of disposable diapers when caring for an infant or toddler. It is stated that if the parent cannot supply that, they do not have childcare, and have to miss work. It is stated that this bill will reach beyond just providing families diapers, it will also provide economic and educational opportunities, as well as better health outcomes for the parents and child.

New London Youth Affairs, Early Childhood and Family Program Leader, Tina Salcedo; supports this bill stating there is an increase in diaper needs and New London Youth Affairs is struggling to keep up with the demand. It is stated that expanding Medicaid to cover diapers from Birth to Three will allow the diaper bank to serve other families in the community that are not Medicaid-eligible.

She Leads Justice, Policy Director, Tonishia Signore; supports this bill stating its passage would be a proactive and impactful action that can greatly help low-income families in Connecticut, where 36% of births that occur are covered by Medicaid.

TEAM, Inc., President and CEO, David Morgan; supports this bill emphasizing its potential to address diaper needs in Connecticut. It is stated that the diaper bank at TEAM provides over 160,000 diapers annually to families in need, with numbers increasing significantly during the pandemic throughout 12 towns in Connecticut. It is stated that diapers can cost between \$80-120 per month per child, and infants and toddlers have on average 8-12 diaper changes per day, which makes this a significant burden on economically disadvantaged families. It is also stated that by providing Medicaid coverage for diapers will ease the burden on these families, reducing the difficult choices they face between purchasing diapers, buying food, or meeting other financial obligations.

The following individuals have submitted written testimony in support of this bill:

Education Researcher, David Cohen

Troup Sch Family Resource Center, FRC Site Coordinator, Tamra Green

Yale School of Medicine, Assistant Clinical Professor, Dr. Ellen D. Nasper, Ph.D.

Connecticut Resident, Ridgefield, Lynn Broder

Connecticut Resident, North Haven, Timothy Gabriele

Connecticut Resident, West Haven, Shahnaz Jalil

Connecticut Resident, West Hartford, Laura Maltz Raza

Connecticut Resident, Wallingford, Maureen McCarthy

Laura Rinaldi

Ray Rinaldi

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None expressed.

Reported by: Angela Rossi

Date: April 10, 2024