

Testimony of Kym Hunter for Appropriations Committee 2/18/09

Good evening Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Kym Hunter. I am the Program Manager at The Diaper Bank. For the past 8 months I have become all too familiar with the obstacles that many Connecticut families face as they struggle to provide basic essentials (such as diapers, toilet paper and wipes) for their children. I have had the wonderful opportunity to see the relief on a mothers face when she is down to her last diaper and she's able to receive an emergency supply from our office and to talk to agency contacts and hear stories of increased participation in parenting classes, play groups and career building workshops as a result of providing diapers as an incentive for participation. It is my sincere hope to express to you through my testimony the vital role The Diaper Bank plays in the ability of many community agencies to reach and provide meaningful services to clients most in need and to provide a hand up to struggling families who are now able to refocus their limited income to other vital household expenses.

My role as program manager hinges upon building relationships with the agencies that we serve. I help guide them through the process of becoming members of our distribution network from application, to orientation then onto ordering and reporting. I have heard of many positive outcomes from agencies as a result of diaper distribution.

Hall Neighborhood House reports that teenage fathers are stepping up to play a more active role in the lives of their children. These young fathers have made a point to come the center once a month to pick up diapers for their children. This empowers the father to be able to provide support and provides an avenue for continued contact with their child.

This increase of father support has also been reported at The Community Closet. There they have noticed an increase of father participation as a result of the downturn in construction jobs. Although they are not able to provide financially, they are showing up to get diapers as way to continue to provide the basics for their families

Another important issue that The Diaper Bank addresses is the inability of mothers to go to work without having an adequate supply of diapers to bring to daycare centers. Daycare centers such as LULAC have reported increased attendance. Without diapers mothers are unable to bring their children to daycare and therefore unable to attend work and/or school. We also have reports in a decrease of Monday morning diaper rash. Facilities have reported that many times parents who are unable to buy an adequate supply of diapers often stretch time between diaper changes when the children are home which leads to diaper rash when the child returns to the centers on Monday.

Although we have continued evidence of the positive effect diaper distribution has had at our provider agencies and the increase of client demand; we have stopped accepting new agency applications. I have had to turn down 20 new agency applications since May 2008. We are unable to expand this vital program due to budgeting restraints. We have also had to place caps on the number of children each agency can serve. I receive at least 15 calls per week from individuals who are in need of diapers. Many of these parents are turned away because of agency caps we have no where to send them. A small number of them come to our office to receive an emergency supply. Here are some

of the stories of these families (your constituents) who have the greatest need and fewer and fewer options to have their needs meet.

Randall T. a homeless single father with an autistic daughter. We have met him in the parking lot of grocery stores to deliver adult diapers to his daughter. We are unable to purchase adult diapers, so there have been instances when we were unable to give him anything because our adult diaper supply is based solely upon donations

Chris C. a homeless father of two, first called us after having all of their possessions stolen while his girlfriend was in the hospital recuperating from surgery. Chris walked over a mile from the shelter to pick up wipes and diapers from our office.

We consistently receive calls from the Ronald McDonald House. Families who are there to receive life saving medical treatments are unable to provide diapers. We are able to help them so that diapers are one less thing to think about as they focus on helping to renew their child's health and strength

We have also helped a family who had recently immigrated to the US from Pakistan. The father was a doctor in Pakistan and the mother has received a PHD in math. They were both unable to find work here. We not only provided them with diapers but connected them to IRIS (one of our provider agencies also facing budget cuts) to receive services (such as translators, transportation, housing assistance) to help them successfully integrate into this country.

In addition to clients, we also receive emergency calls from agencies that perform home visits. They routinely visit homes for the first time to find children without adequate diapers. We are able to give them an emergency pack until they are able to get the child registered with their agency.

My final example is a desperate phone call I received from a single mother of three. This story highlights the true victims of the proposed budget cut of our program as well as speaks to the necessity of continued support. She lives outside of our current provider network but she did not have any other means to get diapers for her child and was down to her last diaper. I told her to come to our office. I was not prepared for what happened when she arrived. She came with her 18 month old son who was in a noticeably soiled diaper. When I gave her the diapers she took her son and changed him on the floor at our office. She did not want her son to sit in the dirty diaper any longer. This child and many like him can ill afford a deaf ear from this panel as important budgeting decisions are made about continued funding for The Diaper Bank and the agencies we serve. Thank you.

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