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Testimony to the Appropriations Committee

The funding for The Diaper Bank has been eliminated in the Governors Mitigation Plan. Our funding, along with many programs that support poor children and families is being cut.

There are no easy solutions or quick fixes to Connecticut's fiscal crisis. However, cannot balance this budgetary shortfall on the backs of children. Let us not go backwards, but creatively look forward to thoughtful budget solutions to Connecticut's budget mess.

For those of you who do not know about us, The Diaper Bank works on the model of food banks. We collect donations of diapers and funding for the purchase of diapers. The diapers then are distributed through local food pantries, soup kitchens, daycare centers, social service agencies and shelters. The Diaper Bank was formed in response to the lack of public assistance for purchasing diapers. Medicaid, Food Stamps and WIC do not cover diapers or any hygiene products.

I am very pleased to tell you about the work the Diaper Bank has done since we received state support 2 years ago when Connecticut became the first state in the country to offer support for diapers for poor children through the department of children and families.

When we first received support from the State Department of Children and Families we were giving 28 agencies in New Haven just over 60,000 diapers a month. In the last 2 years, with state support and the financial support of a number of foundations and private funders we now serve 62 agencies in New Haven, Hartford and Bridgeport. With state support we distribute over 200,000 diapers a month. With State support we reach over 4000 children a year.

The considerable cost of diapers and other personal hygiene products are not included in any entitlement program. I have learned in these past two years that very few people, even among those active in politics and social welfare, know about this gap in the system. One of our goals at The Diaper Bank is to raise the issue of basic needs for children and families regularly when we talk to legislators and when we talk to the general public. So thank you for letting me mention it today.

Raising healthy children is hard – I believe that we make it harder for parents who do not have access to the things their children need on an everyday basis. . Hygiene products are equally expensive as diapers and they are equally as necessary – they impact how children are seen by the outside world including teachers and service providers as well as friends and family. – it also impacts how they see themselves –products like diapers, wipes, A and D ointment as well as soap, shampoo toothbrushes, toothpaste, toilet paper and feminine hygiene products are all important..

I believe that we need to spend money on prevention of problems in order to save money later on- we all know that children thrive when they are well cared for, babies need diapers. They need to have their diapers changed when they are wet or dirty, not when mom or dad can afford another diaper. Older children need to be able to have soap to wash with every day and shampoo for their hair, they need toothbrushes and toothpaste, everyday. The whole family needs toilet paper- girls and women need feminine hygiene

products. These things are necessities, not luxuries. Our system has long treated them as luxuries. Children who are dirty get reported to DCF more often, their parents are accused of not caring for them- of not taking care of them but as I see it we are not taking care of them.

Since we know how much money people getting entitlements have, we know they do not enough to pay for these things. We expect parents to take care of their children, we expect them to come to school clean and healthy every day but the truth is that we often set them up to fail. Providing diapers is a small thing but it can affect big things like education, jobs and child welfare.

The bottom line is: KIDS NEEDS DIAPERS AND TOO MANY PARENTS CANNOT AFFORD THEM.