

**TESTIMONY OF JANET STOLFI ALFANO, MSW**  
**Appropriations Committee**  
**February 14, 2014**

Good evening Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Janet Stolfi Alfano, and I am the Executive Director of The Diaper Bank. I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you this evening.

As you may know, The Diaper Bank was awarded a state grant in 2007 through the prevention department of DCF for \$150,000 per year to provide diapers to families in need. This DCF funding (the first line item for diapers in ANY state budget) allowed us to expand into Hartford, Bridgeport and Greater New Haven.

However, in 2009, Governor Rell eliminated our entire line item out of the budget. We were able to sustain our distribution levels due to an earmark of \$143,000 in 2010 and two years of TANF ARRA Stimulus funding. That ended on September 30, 2011. In April of 2012, we were forced to cut our distribution 35%; at a time when our neediest families were at their most vulnerable.

We received the \$150,000 to distribute diapers because of our experience and efficiency in distribution and our model of collaboration with existing service providers. It is what enables us to get diapers to as many children as we do. \$150,000 buys 50 diapers per month for 1200 children for one full year. The need is huge and we have only begun to meet it.

We have streamlined our operation by significantly increasing our use of volunteers. We're providing diapers to 2,400 children every month through our partner agencies. We know the need is great and we have the capability and capacity to serve more families. What we need is the funding.

While we are the largest diaper bank in the country, we know we could be doing more. We are thrilled that Connecticut has been a leader on this issue in so many ways. Connecticut had the first line item for diapers in the country. Connecticut also lead the nation in using TANF ARRA funding to provide an emergency supply of diapers to ALL TANF eligible residents in the state of CT in 2010 in partnership with The Diaper Bank and the community action agencies throughout our state. None of this could have occurred without the dedication of committed legislative leaders supporting the effort.

Our main objective is keeping babies clean, dry and healthy. By providing diapers, we can reduce the incidences of preventable diseases in children such as: diaper dermatitis which can lead to more serious conditions like bacterial infections including herpes and staphylococci. We can also prevent urinary tract infections in children that can lead to jaundice, fever, loss of appetite, vomiting and renal failure. Providing diapers will improve health outcomes in young children.

According to the Journal Pediatrics (2013), lack of access to diapers was one of the primary stressors for moms. The July 29, 2013 edition of the Journal Pediatrics reported, "...an adequate supply of diapers may prove a tangible way of reducing parenting stress, a critical factor influencing child health and development." Running out of diapers can also be the catalyst for child abuse. Constant crying of a baby can drain a parent - mentally and emotionally. Stress can lead to lapse in judgment and result in physical abuse.

The mission of the Department of Children and Families is to protect children, improve child and family well-being and support and preserve families. We believe that providing a basic need, such as diapers, speaks directly to the core mission of the Department of Children and Families.

We need to spend money on the 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.

The Diaper Bank (TDB) centralizes the fundraising and distribution of diapers to families through existing service providers, including local food pantries, soup kitchens, daycare centers, social service agencies and shelters. Through its extensive Diaper Distribution Network (DDN) of more than 60 agencies, TDB provides

over 120,000 free diapers monthly to poor and low-income families in New Haven, Fairfield, and Hartford and Middlesex Counties.

We know that the demand for these vital services is growing and will continue to increase with the current economic crisis. Without our help and the help of the many organizations servicing our community, our most vulnerable state residents will suffer.

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