

Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on SB 216, An Act Expanding The Sales Tax Exemption To Include Feminine Hygiene Products And Disposable Or Reusable Diapers.

My name is Janet Stolfi Alfano, and I am executive director of The Diaper Bank, a North Haven-based organization that helps 3,000 infants and toddlers in Connecticut whose parents cannot afford an adequate supply of clean diapers. Usually when I come to the legislature, it is to discuss the needs of Connecticut infants and toddlers growing up in poverty. Today I am pleased to be supporting a bill designed to help both women and children – because the fortunes of women and children are linked.

Some of the poorest households in this state depend upon a woman breadwinner. About 23 percent of the female-headed households in Connecticut are struggling below the poverty line.¹ A child born to a single mother in Hartford has a nearly 80 percent chance of growing up in poverty.² Connecticut women make 83 cents for every dollar that their male peers earn, and the gap is even greater for women of color.³

I don't for a moment mean to imply that doing away with the sales tax on a few items will make up for these injustices. It is, quite literally, the *least* we can do to give women facing economic injustice some small relief. It is also the right thing to do.

We do not tax food or medicine in Connecticut, because we recognize that these are necessities. Feminine hygiene products are most certainly necessities. Nobody "treats themselves" to a box of tampons. Imposing a tax on these items amounts to taxing someone for being female. This is an economic double whammy. We make less than our male counterparts – but we pay more for our basic needs.

Similarly, diapering your baby is not a choice – though I have met parents who must choose at the grocery store between filling the cart with food or getting a packet of diapers.

I can only conclude that our tax-code was written by men – people who never menstruated and who preceded the generation of dads who change diapers.

With both diapers and feminine hygiene products, not changing frequently enough – a strategy to stretch the life of a product you cannot afford – carries health risks. These range from simple irritation to serious infections that can be life threatening. Not having access to these products also limits opportunities.

¹ See National Partnership for Women and Families.

<http://www.nationalpartnership.org/research-library/workplace-fairness/fair-pay/9-2015-ct-wage-gap.pdf>

² See Meeting the Challenge: The Dynamics of Poverty in Connecticut.

<http://www.cafca.org/files/CT%20Poverty%20Report.pdf>

³ National Partnership for Women and Families

There has been much attention paid lately to providing feminine hygiene products for girls in the developing world, who otherwise miss school when they are menstruating. Days for Girls, however, a non-profit formed to address girl's school attendance, now distributes feminine pads in the United States, where they've found girls do indeed miss class when they have their periods.⁴

You know, the founder of my organization used to joke that she started a Diaper Bank because she didn't think anyone would support a Tampon Bank. Our vision has always been to provide basic necessities that aren't covered by government programs, such as Food Stamps and WIC.

As I said, the Diaper Bank helps diaper 3,000 babies in Connecticut. While I am proud of that, and all the partners that make it possible, the need is far greater than our capacity to help. More than 39,000 Connecticut infants and toddlers live in poor or low-income families. An adequate supply of diapers costs more than \$100 per month.

This causes parents to leave babies too long in wet and soiled diapers. A Yale study found that 30 percent of New Haven low-income mothers could not change their babies as frequently as wanted.⁵ The result is diaper rash and more serious infections. The study also found a link between diaper need and maternal depression. As you know, maternal depression leads to a host of bad outcomes for mothers and their children – including poor school readiness and involvement with the child welfare system.

Because childcare centers will not accept children without a supply of disposable diapers, parents miss days at work – and sometimes lose their jobs all together. Particularly for mothers working hourly wage jobs, time lost because of childcare difficulties is devastating. Women make up two-thirds of the workforce in low-wage jobs, and close to a third of the women in this group are mothers.⁶

Eliminating sales tax on diapers and feminine hygiene products amounts to a 6.35 percent price drop. That's significant and will make these items more affordable. Beyond the practicality of the matter, there is a question of fairness. We shouldn't tax women for being women. We shouldn't tax parents for caring for their children.

I'd like to leave you with a picture of the women The Diaper Bank serves. Moms in poverty are often saddled with negative stereotypes. I see mothers who get up at the crack of dawn to get their kids to childcare, then take two buses to a job that never quite pays the bills. They do this day in and day out – and still always find the energy to help out a neighbor or friend who is sick

⁴ See <http://www.one.org/us/2016/02/11/why-menstruation-shouldnt-stop-education-period/>

⁵ See Megan Smith, et al. "Diaper Need and Its Impact on Child Health" *Pediatrics*
<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2013/07/23/peds.2013-0597>

⁶ See National Women's Law Center. *Underpaid and Overloaded*. http://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/executivesummary_nwlc_lowwagereport2014.pdf

or down on their luck.

Their feet hurt. Their hearts hurt. They know the world is not fair. Eliminating the tax on these products would show these women that their government recognizes their struggles and is taking a step toward justice. It would tell them that they matter.

Thank you. I would be happy to take your questions.