

Good morning Senator Harp and members of the Achievement Gap Task force.

My name is Janet Stolfi Alfano, Acting Executive Director of The Diaper Bank; a non-profit organization that centralizes the fundraising and distribution of free diapers to low-income families through existing service providers, including local food pantries, childcare centers, shelters, and other social service agencies.

Through our Diaper Distribution Network (DDN) of 66 agencies, TDB provides over 200,000 free diapers monthly to low-income families in Greater New Haven, Bridgeport, Hartford, and Middlesex County. Distributing diapers through existing social service agencies allows us to reach over 4000 children each month, but it also allows our diaper distribution partners to increase participation in their programs by offering the diapers to families.

Many people do not realize that safety-net programs such as the Snap/Food Stamp Program and WIC do not cover the cost of diapers, which can be anywhere from \$80-\$100 per month.

In addition, most licensed child care centers do not accept cloth diapers, and require parents and caregivers to provide a steady supply of disposable diapers.

Low-income parents cannot take advantage of free or subsidized childcare if they cannot afford to leave disposable diapers at childcare centers. If parents cannot access childcare, then they are less able to attend work or school on a consistent basis.

The following is a list of the many benefits of having a reliable and adequate supply of diapers and diapering supplies.

For infants and toddlers:

- Children's health and development will improve as diseases associated with infrequent diaper changing, such as urinary tract infections and diaper dermatitis, decrease.^{1,2}
- Children will miss fewer days of preschool due to diarrhea and respiratory illnesses.^{3,4}
- Infants and toddlers will be better able to enroll in early education programs, increasing their school readiness and overall development.

For families

- Parents will be more able to work and support their family because their children can now enroll in early education programs.
- Parents will miss fewer days of work due to children's illness.⁵
- Fewer cases of respiratory and gastrointestinal diseases reduce medical costs associated with such diseases, lightening the economic burden on families. ⁶

For communities:

- Increased enrollment in early education will benefit child care businesses and the economic health of the community.
- Children will be better prepared to succeed in school and become economically contributing citizens.
- Community epidemics of infectious diseases, such as viral meningitis, Hepatitis A, shigellosis, and diarrhea, may decrease.^{7,8}

I'd like to share a story about the positive impact that diapers has on a young woman who receives diapers from one of our partner agencies. She was interviewed by The Diaper Bank and gave us permission to share her story.

"I like everything about being a mom," says Equalia Jenkins. But then she adds: "It's really difficult for me, paying my bills. That's the difficult part of being a mom." When the Middletown woman found she was expecting, she says it was a wake up call for her to get into a career with a future. Equalia studied to be a certified nursing assistant and started working as a CNA just about the time her son, Jaseri, was born. It was hard to simultaneously keep up with a new baby and a new job. Nevertheless, Equalia says that she is always looking for additional hours "to make ends meet." She's also about to enroll at Middlesex Community College. "My goal is to be a registered nurse. I'm going to do it," she says.

While she's at work and school, Equalia is able send Jaseri to child care with a supply of diapers she gets through Early Head Start, a Diaper Bank partner agency. Without the help, there would be times she simply could not afford diapers, she says. Jaseri is an extremely active boy. "He's very smart for a two-year-old," says his proud mom. Early Head Start helps Equalia find good ways to channel Jaseri's energy. She foresees a future for him with lots of opportunities for mental and physical workouts. "It would be good for him to be involved in sports," she says. "And, yes, I'd definitely like to see him go to college."

As a new member of the Early Childhood Alliance, The Diaper Bank supports the assertion that addressing the achievement gap must begin at birth with high-quality early care and education. Connecticut must increase access to these programs, and better coordinate our current efforts. To do that, Connecticut must implement early childhood legislation passed last year, Public Act 11-181, which will result in a system for all children - from birth - that aligns and coordinates services in the areas of health, safety, nutrition, parental support, child care and early education.

References

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