Written Testimony for SB 80

Submitted by Sarah Hastie and Laura Mullins,

Representatives of

The Columbus Diaper Coalition

My name is Sarah Hastie, I am the Director of Community Engagement at the Columbus Diaper Coalition and also a Registered Nurse in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at Nationwide Children’s Hospital. I am here today with Laura Mullins, the Executive Director of the Columbus Diaper Coalition. Thank you for allowing us to be here today and to speak today on the subject of diaper need.

The National Diaper Bank Network defines diaper need as the lack of a sufficient supply of diapers to keep an infant or child clean, dry, and healthy. The National Diaper Bank Network reports the following facts about Diaper Need nationally:

* 1 in 3 American families reports experiencing diaper need.
* 5.2 million children in the U.S. aged three or younger live in poor or low-income families.
* Infants require up to 12 diapers per day, toddlers about 8.
* Disposable diapers can cost $70 to $80 per month per baby.
* No state or federal child safety-net program allocates dollars specifically for the purchase of diapers.
* Without transportation, buying diapers at a convenience store rather than a large “big box” store can significantly increase the monthly cost of diapers.
* Most childcare centers, even free and subsidized facilities require parents to provide a day’s supply of disposable diapers. \* (National Diaper Bank Network Website)

Ohio Diaper Facts-Compiled by the National Diaper Bank Network

We believe that diapers are as essential to a baby's healthy development as a parent’s love. Keeping infants and toddlers clean, dry, and healthy is key to building a solid foundation for all children to reach their full potential. But one in three families struggles to provide clean diapers for their baby.

There are 416,395 Ohioans under age of 3. 20% of those children live in families earning less than 100% of the Federal Poverty Level.

Ohio’s babies need strong foundations. Children in low-income families are at greatest risk of suffering the effects of diaper need. Current public support programs—such as SNAP, WIC and TANF—help some, but young children have additional needs necessary for healthy growth and to reach their full potential.

In 2018, 42% of Ohio births were covered by Medicaid, meaning that nearly half of all infants in Ohio are born to low-income families. In Ohio, 12% of SNAP recipients are under age 5. 24% of WIC recipients are Infants. 24% of TANF Families have at least one child under the age of 3.

Most child care facilities require parents to provide diapers for their child. Nationally, 57% of parents experiencing diaper need who rely on child care facilities reported that they missed an average of four days of school or work in the past month because they didn't have diapers. The cost of infant Care in Ohio accounts for 11% of income in two-parent households and 44% of income in single-parent households.

TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) and Diapers in Ohio.

The only federal assistance program that can be used for diapers is TANF. Cash assistance provided by TANF can be used to purchase diapers. However, TANF has to cover many other expenses, including utility bills, rent, clothing, transportation, and other basic needs. Little, if any, money is available to purchase enough diapers to keep a baby clean, dry, and healthy. An average monthly supply of diapers costs approximately $80. The max benefit for a family of 3 (1 parents and 2 children) in Ohio is $474 per month.

Ohio’s Diaper Banks help fill the gap between the federal assistance programs I’ve just described and diaper need. Ohio has 8 diaper banks that are members of the National Diaper Bank Network. These 8 diaper banks distribute 1,411,247 diapers annually. All diaper banks require community support and donations of diapers and dollars to improve the well-being of children and families in our communities.

The Columbus Diaper Coalition is one of these diaper banks. We were born out of a need that we recognized in our community. Our founders felt a personal connection to families struggling to make ends meet and provide for their children. We launched in November of 2013 with the goal of helping to bridge the diaper gap. Our mission at the Columbus Diaper Coalition is to provide diapers to families who are suffering from financial difficulties. At the Columbus Diaper Coalition we believe that access to diapers is a basic human need, and something as simple as a fresh, clean diaper can provide health and happiness to families and babies.

The Columbus Diaper Coalition is an all-volunteer non-profit organization. Our diaper bank functions as a supporting agency by forming partnerships with non-profits in the Central Ohio community. These partner agencies distribute the diapers they receive from us directly to members of our community.

The Columbus Diaper Coalition supports 17 partner agencies in Franklin County. 60% of our partners are food pantries; 40% are social support organizations. On average, we distribute 35,000 diapers per month. In 2017, we distributed a total of 423,000 diapers. In 2018 we distributed 410,000 diapers (drop in volume due to inventory shortage, not due to a decrease in diaper need).

Diaper need is a problem across the nation and in Ohio. 1 in 3 families struggles to afford diapers. Lack of access to diapers perpetuates a cycle of poverty that affects our families.

What exactly is at stake? If families do not have reliable access to clean diapers, they take steps to make ends meet by stretching the use of the diapers they do have. Parents have reported resorting to such steps as taking soiled diapers off, dumping out the stool, and putting the diapers back on; air-drying soiled disposable diapers; or letting their children sit in wet or soiled diapers for longer than they should. All of these practices are not only emotionally distressing to parents and children, but also have serious health implications such as diaper rash, skin breakdown, urinary tract and kidney infections. If a child becomes ill due to one of these health complications, this can mean time off work for parents, and increased cost to the healthcare system—not to mention the distress and anxiety to both the parent and the child. Diaper need increases parental stress at a higher rate than most other needs—largely because there are dedicated programs in place to provide assistance for other needs—like food and formula (SNAP and WIC).

Designating a week as Diaper Need Awareness Week will spotlight the issue of Diaper Need, the Diaper Gap, and how this issue is affecting families in the Buckeye state and across the nation.