

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 11, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate

Dear Leader McConnell and Leader Schumer:

As you consider an additional emergency recovery package in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we urge you to include at least \$200 million in funding for diaper assistance through the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG).

COVID-19 has forced working families into dire circumstances. Even as parents face layoffs and unprecedented unemployment numbers, recent reporting has shown a run on diapers from stockpiling and supply chain issues,<sup>1</sup> leaving families unsure if they will be able to access diapers for their children. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, surveys indicated that one in three families in the United States with young children could not afford an adequate supply of diapers<sup>2</sup>—which costs about \$18 per week—to keep their child clean, dry, and healthy.<sup>3</sup> The lowest-income families pay an even higher-than-average price for diapers because they do not have access to money saving alternatives such as bulk buying or online shopping that can reduce costs. Low-income families spend about 14 percent of their income on diapers, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, often making parents literally choose between groceries and diapers.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, child care operators generally require families to supply disposable diapers and will not care for children without them. When parents cannot afford diapers, they also miss work. A study by The Diaper Bank of Connecticut found that when diaper need was a barrier to child care, adults missed an average of four workdays a month.<sup>5</sup> Having access to these services is especially imperative for our essential workers so that their children can be accepted into daycare or childcare facilities. Essential workers should not have to worry about diaper need becoming a barrier for accessing childcare.

---

<sup>1</sup> Jessica Grose, “Families Scramble to Find Baby Formula, Diapers and Wipes,” *New York Times*, May 6, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Huggies, “Huggies® Every Little Bottom Study Diaper need in the U.S. and Canada,” June 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Megan V. Smith, Anna Kruse, Alison Weir and Joanne Goldblum, “Diaper Need and Its Impact on Child Health,” *Pediatrics*; originally published online July 29, 2013; DOI: 10.1542/peds.2013-0597

<sup>4</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Expenditure Survey’s unpublished Diary Survey, “The Poorest Spending a Large Percentage of their Money on Diapers,” Retrieved from <https://cepr.net/images/cashman-diapers-2015-11.png>.

<sup>5</sup> Fred Carstensen, Peter Gunther, Connecticut Center for Economic Analysis, “Better Health for Children and Increased Opportunities for Families, National Diaper Bank Network.

Our communities are fortunate to have the support of a network of nonprofit, community-based diaper banks, which distribute more than 80 million diapers annually. Yet, even before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, nonprofit diaper bank distribution only met five to six percent of diaper need. Most diaper banks, which were already oversubscribed and had waiting lists for partner agencies, are now facing severe supply shortages due to the demand increase as more families experience job loss during this pandemic. A diaper bank in Southern Maine, for example, expects to exhaust a new donation of 260,000 diapers—roughly the size of their average annual distribution—in just the next few months. Diaper banks have also had to cancel diaper drives, volunteer events, and fundraisers in order to comply with social distancing orders, resulting in a reduction of available supplies. Despite this strain, many diaper banks are working hard to adapt to social distancing guidelines, such as the Eastern Iowa Diaper Bank which has moved to drive-through service, distributing 51,600 diapers and 824 packages of wipes since March 23rd—up from their average 15,000 diapers per month.

A clean diaper—a necessity for the health and well-being of every young child—is a basic need. Yet, there is no diaper equivalent to federal programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) that assists with other infant and child needs, including food. Providing \$200 million through the SSBG, supplying \$150 million for diaper purchasing and \$50 million to distribution and administration, would allow nonprofit diaper banks to distribute 600 million diapers, meeting an additional 40 to 55 percent of pre-COVID-19 demand, and furthering the ability of parents and caregivers to return to work and provide the basic necessities their families require to thrive. A study conducted on The Diaper Bank of Connecticut found that every dollar spent providing families with diapers created \$11 of economic returns in the form of increased hours worked, increased spending, educational advancement, and higher wages.<sup>6</sup>

We urge you to prioritize the need of low-income families and front-line workers who are in critical need of diaper assistance to provide for the health, safety, and economic security of their children. We thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Senator Christopher S. Murphy  
Senator Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
Senator Kirsten Gillibrand  
Senator Tammy Baldwin

Senator Joni K. Ernst  
Senator Susan M. Collins  
Senator Kevin Cramer  
Senator Thom Tillis

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.