



HB3895 - The Happy Healthy Babies Bill

Subject Matter Hearing - House Human Services Appropriations Committee

*Written Testimony Provided by Nadeen Israel, Policy Director, EverThrive Illinois
Thursday, May 11, 2017*

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of HB3895, the Happy Healthy Babies bill. My name is Nadeen Israel and I am the Policy Director at EverThrive Illinois.

EverThrive IL works to improve the health of Illinois women, children, and families over their lifespan through community engagement, partnership, policy analysis, education, and advocacy. We have been an ardent supporter and advocate on issues that impact maternal and child health including maternal and infant mortality; immunizations; and access to affordable, comprehensive, and quality healthcare through private health insurance and Medicaid. **We stand in strong support of HB3895**, the Happy Healthy Babies bill, as it addresses an urgent need that is currently unmet in the safety-net system for infants and toddlers living in deep poverty (below 50% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL)) in Illinois.

HB3895 helps struggling families living in deep poverty afford diapers for their infants and toddlers (0-3 years old). The bill does this by setting up a state-funded program that provides a monthly diaper allowance of \$80/month/child (0-3 years old) on an EBT card that is restricted to the purchase of diapers. This bill fills a hole in the current safety-net system for a basic need for Illinois children in deep poverty.

On average, a baby needs 6-10 diapers a day, which costs around \$80 per month. A family of three living in deep poverty lives on \$850 or less a month. This means that a full supply of diapers for just one child in such a family consumes around 10% or more of their family's monthly income. Currently, families cope with the high cost of diapers the best they can, including extending the use of diapers by not changing them as often as necessary or drying and re-using them. When parents cannot stretch their supply of diapers any longer, some rely on t-shirts, rags, underwear, toilet paper, menstrual pads or other disposable items to diaper their babies. Not only do these methods of coping with this very real, and every-day need lead to negative health issues for the child (e.g. urinary tract infections, diaper rash, oral-fecal contamination), they also negatively impact parents' mental health as well as overall public health.

Research from the Yale School of Medicine found that diaper need is a stronger predictor of stress for mothers than neighborhood crime and food insecurity, and an adequate supply of diapers may prove a tangible way of reducing parent stress, a critical factor influencing child health and development, and maternal depression. Unmet diaper needs can also have negative public health consequences; including the spread of hepatitis A, viral meningitis and bacterial diarrheas. Infectious agents can contaminate feces and leaking soiled diapers can lead to the spread of these illnesses while frequent hand to mouth behavior by infants can exacerbate the spread of germs.

While we recognize that Illinois' budget reality is dire, we also know this unmet need is costing the state more in otherwise unavoidable healthcare costs (for the child and mother/parent) as families in deep poverty qualify

and are likely on Medicaid. In addition, the mental health issues this unmet need causes in mothers and parents/caretakers can lead to additional unnecessary healthcare spending by the state's Medicaid program. Lastly, this unmet need can impact parents' ability to obtain and/or maintain employment (as you'll read in the story below), leading to a loss of potential tax revenue and a larger negative economic impact on many communities.

Lastly, I'll leave you with April's story. April is a hard-working mom from Benton, Illinois where she lives with her partner and their children, two of whom are young children still in diapers. April has been unemployed for the past 7 months and is currently actively looking for work. She and her partner make ends meet through her partner's minimum-wage job and the unemployment benefits April receives; they struggle to make ends meet. The exorbitant cost of diapers represent a significant monthly expense for her family; causing health risks for her entire family, and creating additional stress for both parents. April already has to decide between food for her family, putting gas in the car to make it to her next interview, or diapers. The ways she coped when she is low on diapers include: using the diaper for too long of a period of time, which led her child to have diarrhea; borrowing money for diapers from family and friends; and putting off paying other bills (which then accumulate interest) in order to buy diapers. April is worried that one of her children may have MRSA/Staph infection from having diapers on for too long. April is constantly stressed, and knows her children deserve better.

This bill makes a real difference in the lives of struggling parents and their young children. We urge your support of HB3895 in order to keep babies healthy, promote maternal and infant health, and provide the needed support for moms like April to obtain and maintain stable employment and support themselves and their families. Please do not hesitate to reach out if you have questions or if we can be of any assistance on this issue; Nadeen Israel, nisrael@everthriveil.org, (847) 620-9758.

Sincerely,

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