



**TESTIMONY OF
CONNECTICUT HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION
SUBMITTED TO THE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE
Thursday, March 7, 2024**

HB 5368, An Act Concerning Medicaid Coverage Of Diapers

The Connecticut Hospital Association (CHA) appreciates this opportunity to submit testimony concerning **HB 5368, An Act Concerning Medicaid Coverage Of Diapers**. CHA supports this bill.

Diapers are an essential means to ensure diaper hygiene and prevent a range of avoidable medical conditions in infants and young children. Poor diaper hygiene due to lack of access to a consistent supply of diapers has been linked to several maternal and child health conditions, including maternal depression, poor infant sleep, infant and child urinary tract infections, and diaper dermatitis (known as “diaper rash”). Diaper need has been shown to be the number one stressor and risk factor for postpartum depression. Providing coverage for diapers when medically necessary is essential and appropriate care. It is also an effective preventive health and early intervention strategy that benefits both children and their caregivers.

Coverage for diapers is also good fiscal policy. The 2018 economic modeling study of diaper provision by The Diaper Bank of Connecticut and the University of Connecticut found that the incidence of diaper rash declined by 33% when families received supplies of clean diapers and babies experienced 77% fewer days of diaper rash. Given that the proposed coverage is targeted to those for whom coverage is medically necessary, it is likely the savings associated with reduced avoidable use of healthcare services (child and caregiver) will offset the cost of coverage. There are other benefits as well. The study also predicted that every dollar spent relieving diaper need produced an 11-fold increase in personal income for families struggling to afford diapers. Results from the 2023 National Diaper Bank Network’s annual household survey found that 3 in 5 parents miss work or school because they can’t afford the diapers required to leave their baby in childcare. Therefore, addressing diaper need supports a universal goal of advancing economic mobility, increasing access to commercial coverage (and thus reducing reliance on Medicaid), and reducing racial and ethnic health disparities in health access and outcomes.

With this evidence in mind, CHA, along with The Diaper Bank of Connecticut, and the Connecticut Department of Housing have partnered on an innovative approach to address diaper need. Established in November 2022, *Diaper Connections* has implemented screening

for diaper need at Connecticut hospitals and offers diaper distribution through local hospitals and their community partners to ensure monthly supplies of diapers are available to families who need them. Families identified with a need for diapers are connected in the immediate postpartum period and during pediatric healthcare visits.

Medicaid coverage of diapers will support the work under way and is a targeted policy intervention that will make diapers readily available to families with children who have a medical necessity and who experience other barriers to accessing this essential resource. The impact of this change in state policy will go beyond the direct benefit to Medicaid recipients for whom diapers are a medical necessity. The Diaper Bank of Connecticut, *Diaper Connections*, and other community organizations with diaper distribution programs are often constrained by limited supply and increasing demand. The targeted Medicaid coverage proposed in this bill will enable diaper banks and community organizations to direct their support to those for whom the provision of diapers is not medically necessary and families who are not eligible for public assistance such as children in ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) households who experience diaper insecurity.

Connecticut has demonstrated its commitment to safeguarding the health of its low-income children and families with the expansion of Medicaid coverage to one-year postpartum of all birthing persons and to children 12 and younger regardless of immigration status. Covering diapers for young children likely to experience a series of diaper-related conditions and hospital visits is another essential child-focused Medicaid preventive health solution that will protect the health of children. Moreover, it will protect the health of their caregivers and thus is well aligned with the Governor's maternal health strategy and the goals of the Department of Social Services' forthcoming Maternity Bundled Payment Program.

In conclusion, CHA strongly supports this proposal to systematically address diaper insecurity through Medicaid coverage as medically necessary.

Thank you for your consideration of our position. For additional information, contact CHA Government Relations at (203) 294-7310.