March 28, 2017

The Honorable Michael Sprinkle
Committee on Health and Human Services
Legislative Building, Room 3132
Carson City, NV 89701

Dear Chairman Sprinkle,

On behalf of the National Diaper Bank Network, I am writing in support of Bill AB 340 to require the state Department of Health and Human Services to take an active role in finding federal resources to provide diapers and to promote and support diaper banks in their mission to provide diapers for children in need.

The National Diaper Bank Network is a network of over 300 diaper banks, including four in Nevada, which distributed nearly 132,000 diapers last year, serving over 500 Nevada children each month. We are committed to ensuring that families have the basic needs like diapers necessary to thrive.

Without sufficient diapers, children are exposed to increased risk of urinary tract infection and severe diaper dermatitis. Diaper dermatitis, for example, can cause pain, risk of infection, increased hospital costs, and distress among infants and their parents. Diapers also are necessary in advancing the mental health of children and their families. Children in a wet diaper are more likely to cry or be irritable, which can cause increased levels of stress in both child and parent. Stress negatively affects the architecture of the brain in young children. Plus, research the National Diaper Bank Network conducted through the Yale University MOMs Partnership reported a strong correlation between diaper need and maternal depression.

Diapers also affect a child and her parent’s ability to participate in society. Parents who lack sufficient diapers for their child may be unable to leave their child in child care, and thus unable to work or attend school, which impacts the families economic well-being.

Unfortunately for many families, diapers are not inexpensive; a year’s supply of diapers can cost $960 or more. In a survey commissioned by Feeding America, low-wage clients of food banks admitted that they often stretch time between changes in order to make their diaper funds last longer or try to reuse disposable diapers. Diaper banks work to help families fill the gap by providing supplemental diapers (we recommend that diaper banks provide at least 50 diapers for each child each month).

Nevada’s diaper banks do great work, but they are limited in their ability to reach the 42,000 children under the age of three years old living in poor and low-income families. In a large state like Nevada, with a relatively small number of diaper banks, state support in finding resources and raising awareness of the work of diaper banks in addressing diaper need, could help them reach many, many more. Passing this measure, as the Hygiene
Assistance for Families of Infants and Toddler Act of 2017 (H.R. 1143) works its way through the U.S. Congress ensures that Nevada will be well positioned to take advantage of that act when it passes. It will also position the state to take advantage of other federal grants that may be offered to issues linked to diaper need. Diaper need touches a number of aspects of daily life. Not having diapers is not only a symptom of poverty, it can affect a family’s ability to escape poverty. Without diapers, a parent may be unable to leave a child at day care, most of which require families to bring diapers for their children, so the parent would have to find less satisfactory child care arrangements or miss work or school. Children in a diaper too long become stressed and irritable, leading to increased stress on parents. Children in a leaky, full diaper may expose their families and communities to increased risk of fecal borne disease. Federal grants currently support initiatives to address public health and work supports for struggling families—diapers often could be an answer or part of an answer to these problems.

Community based organizations that work with diaper banks find that partnering with a diaper bank can also benefit their ability to provide client services. A recently published paper on partnerships between diaper banks and community-based organizations found that organizations experienced greater communication with clients, better client retention, and better client outcomes as a result of partnering with the diaper bank.iii

The diaper bank movement is growing, and more people are aware of the fact that too many families struggle to provide diapers for their children. They are also becoming more aware that diaper banks alone cannot solve the problem. Legislatures in California, Illinois, Minnesota, New Jersey, and New York are looking at how to address diaper need as a public health issue and a work support issue. I urge Nevada to join this effort in raising awareness and support for the state’s diaper banks.

Thank you for your consideration of this issue.

Yours,

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National Diaper Bank Network

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