



October 23, 2017

The Honorable Barbara Lee  
 Member of the U.S. House of Representatives  
 2267 Rayburn House  
 Office Building  
 Washington, DC 20515

**Re: AB 480 (Gonzalez-Fletcher) Signed into Law - Thank you!**

Dear Congresswoman Lee,

Our organizations are writing to thank you for your support for Assembly Bill 480 (Gonzalez-Fletcher), which was signed into law last week. The new law will address health and work barriers of unmet diaper needs of welfare-to-work participants in the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) program.

Your letter in support of the legislation,<sup>1</sup> signed by 19 members of California's Caucus helped to elevate this issue in the Governor's office and, we believe, was important in securing a signature for the bill.

***Families Who Rely on CalWORKs Live in Deep Poverty***

The CalWORKs program was established 20 years ago to protect children, provide assistance to families so that children can be cared for in their own home, and support parents in preparing for and securing work. Every nonexempt CalWORKs adult recipient must participate in welfare-to-work activities as a condition of eligibility for benefits.<sup>2</sup> Welfare-to-work is designed to assist welfare recipients to obtain or prepare for employment in order to eventually leave welfare and become self-sufficient.<sup>3</sup>

***Unmet Diaper Needs Dangerous to Child Development***

The current maximum CalWORKs grant for a family of three when parent(s) are complying with welfare-to-work requirements is 44% of the federal poverty line (FPL). When children live in deep

<sup>1</sup> <http://wclp.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Final-Rep-Lee-diaper-letter.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Welf. & Inst.Code §§ 11320.3(a), 11322.8; MPP § 42-712

<sup>3</sup> MPP § 42-701.1.

poverty (defined as below 50% of the FPL), they endure hardships that will impair their ability to enjoy life and thrive<sup>4</sup> and impact their capacity to learn and develop.<sup>5</sup> One study found that growing up in deep poverty more negatively impacts a child's life chances than neonatal exposure to cocaine.<sup>6</sup>

Childhood deep poverty not only has a short-term impact on educational success and classroom environments at schools with a high-density of very poor children, it results in adult dependency on safety net services.<sup>7</sup> One of the reasons that deep poverty is so dangerous for children is because they live in households where basic needs are going unmet. Children living in these conditions not only experience depravity of not having their needs met, but are also deeply impacted by the toxic stress that results from chronically unmet needs.<sup>8</sup>

When a family is unable to afford the 8-12 diapers<sup>9</sup> needed daily for an infant, they simply use fewer diapers, which means that babies will linger, uncomfortable and unhappy, for longer periods of time in diapers that contains urine and feces. Prolonged exposure to urine and fecal matter breaks down the natural defenses of the infant's skin and resulting in a painful diaper rash. Without an adequate supply of diapers, a simple rash can turn in to a more complicated rash that requires medication. Poor children are already more likely to experience illness than other children, unmet diaper needs both increases the likelihood of illness and undermines one tool used to treat illness resulting in diarrhea or rash. In California alone, more than 42,000 in 2015 medical visits cited the reason for the visit as diaper dermatitis, urinary tract infection, or the related bacterial infection candidiasis. Nearly 80 percent of these medical visits took place in an emergency room. These are not only preventable and stressful ailments, but they also cause additional expenses for families and the health care system.

Unmet diaper needs don't only impact the physical health of a child, but also their mental health and future potential. This is because parents who are unable to adequately diaper their children are more likely to experience maternal depression,<sup>10</sup> a condition associated with reduced maternal-child interaction known to undermine school readiness among poor children.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, lack of adequate diaper supply can interrupt or prevent participation in early learning settings. Most early learning childcare settings require families to bring their own diapers. So even when the price of childcare is subsidized, a poor infant and toddlers may be kept from reaping the many benefits of participating in an early child education setting because their parents are unable to

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<sup>4</sup> "Family Poverty, Welfare Reform, and Child Development" Greg J. Duncan and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn Source: Child Development, Vol. 71, No. 1 (Jan. - Feb., 2000), pp. 188-196 Published by: Blackwell Publishing on behalf of the Society for Research in Child Development <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1132232>

<sup>5</sup> The Long Reach of Childhood Poverty,

[http://www.stanford.edu/group/scspi/\\_media/pdf/pathways/winter\\_2011/PathwaysWinter11\\_Duncan.pdf](http://www.stanford.edu/group/scspi/_media/pdf/pathways/winter_2011/PathwaysWinter11_Duncan.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> [http://articles.philly.com/2013-07-22/news/40709969\\_1\\_hallam-hurt-so-called-crack-babies-funded-study](http://articles.philly.com/2013-07-22/news/40709969_1_hallam-hurt-so-called-crack-babies-funded-study)

<sup>7</sup> Barton, Paul E, and Richard J Coley. *The Family: America's Smallest School*. Policy Information Report, Princeton: Educational Testing Service, 2007, and Berliner, David C. *Poverty and Potential: Out-of-School Factors and School Success*. Boulder and Tempe: Education and the Public Interest Center & Education Policy Research Unit, 2009.

<sup>8</sup> Evans, G. W. and English, K. (2002), The Environment of Poverty: Multiple Stressor Exposure, Psychophysiological Stress, and Socioemotional Adjustment. *Child Development*, 73: 1238-1248. doi: 10.1111/1467-8624.00469

<sup>9</sup> Source: National Diaper Bank Network: [www.nationaldiaperbanknetwork.org](http://www.nationaldiaperbanknetwork.org)

<sup>10</sup> <http://news.yale.edu/2013/07/29/no-money-diapers-depressing-reality-poor-mothers>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/412199-infants-of-depressed.pdf>

afford the number of diapers required by the center.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, and more to the point of this bill, when a family is unable to provide for the mandatory diapers required by the child care center, the parent(s) are also unable to participate in welfare-to-work.

**AB 480 Will Have Significant impact**

AB 480's signature will remove barriers to work and employment and training for parents of infants and toddlers by making resources available to support diaper costs necessary for a child is enrolled in child care and their parents are meeting the work requirements of the CalWORKs program. Approximately 12% of children who receive CalWORKs are younger than 2 years of age.<sup>13</sup> By ensuring that the parents of these infants and toddlers have the resources necessary for adequate diapering while they are enrolled in school, this new law will reduce hardship and harm to children and improve work outcomes of their parents.

**Thank You For Your Support for AB 480**

AB 480 will reduce the impact of unmet basic needs for California's poorest babies and toddlers. For all of these reasons, we are grateful for your support and for its passage.

Sincerely,



Jessica Bartholow, Western Center on Law and Poverty

- Kevin Aslanian, Coalition of California Welfare Rights Advocates
- Andrew Cheyne, California Association of Food Banks
- Benito Delgado Olson, Supply Bank
- Noreen Ferrel, Equal Rights Advocates, California
- Nourbese Flint, Black Women for Wellness
- Rebecca Griffin, NARAL
- Mary Ignatius, Parent Voices California
- Gail Johnson Vaughan, Families Now
- Moira Kenney, First 5 Association of California
- Kelly Sawyer Patricof and Norah Weinstein, Co-Presidents of Baby2Baby
- Cathy Senderling-McDonald, County Welfare Director's Association
- Kelly Siefkin, Sacramento Food Bank & Family Services
- Jessica Stender, Stronger California Coalition
- Michele Stillwell-Parvensky, Children's Defense Fund - California
- Lisa Truong and Lauren Treadwell, J.D., Help A Mother Out
- Izra Uz-Zaman, American Association of Pediatrics
- Alison Wier, National Diaper Bank Network

CC: Assembly Member Gonzalez-Fletcher, California State Assembly (Author)

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<sup>12</sup> For a good summary of research on the benefits of early child education, see: <http://raisingcaliforniatogether.org/research-reports/>

<sup>13</sup> The Research and Development Enterprise Project (RADEP) 2012 Children's Data