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March 14, 2017

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The Honorable Matt Dean
Chair, Health and Human Services Finance Committee
100 Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Representative Dean,

On behalf of the National Diaper Bank Network, I am writing in support of an amendment to Bill HF 1861 to add funding to provide diapers through the Minnesota Food Shelve program.

The National Diaper Bank Network is a network of over 300 diaper banks, including three in Minnesota, which distributed nearly 240,000 diapers last year. We are committed to ensuring that families have the basic needs like diapers necessary to thrive.

Diapers are as essential to good health as food and medical supplies. 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.ⁱ 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.ⁱⁱ Families who visit food pantries for food often need diapers as well. Several members of the National Diaper Bank Network are primarily food banks who, recognizing the synergy between food insecurity and diaper need, added diaper programs to their offering in order to provide wrap around services. By adding diapers to the food shelves, families will be able to obtain two of their most basic needs—food and diapers—in a single location.

Minnesota's diaper banks do great work, but they are limited in their ability to reach the 71,000 children under the age of three years old living in poor and low-income families. In a large state like Minnesota, with a relatively small



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number of diaper banks, providing diapers through the state's Food Shelves could help ensure that more families obtain the diapers they need. Amending HF 1861 to include diapers would help make a good bill great, and go a long way in helping address diaper need in Minnesota.

Thank you for your consideration of this issue.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alison M. Weir".

Alison M. Weir, Ph.D., J.D.
Chief, Policy, Research, and Analysis
National Diaper Bank Network

ⁱ M. V. Smith, A. Kruse, A. Weir, & J. Goldblum. (2013). Diaper Need and Its Impact on

Child Health. *Pediatrics*, 132(2), 253-259. doi: 10.1542/peds.2013-0597

ⁱⁱ Feeding America, In Short Supply (2012), available at <http://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/our-research/in-short-supply/>