

Testimony in Support of H.B. No. 6937: An Act Concerning Medicaid Coverage for Medically Necessary Children's Diapers

Good morning, Senator Lesser, Representative Gilcrest, and honorable members of the Human Services Committee.

My name is Fr. Michael R. Johnson, OFM, and I serve as a Catholic priest at St. Patrick-St. Anthony Parish in Hartford and as the Executive Director of the Franciscan Center for Urban Ministry. I appreciate the opportunity to testify in strong support of H.B. 6937, a bill that takes an important step toward ensuring the dignity, health, and well-being of Connecticut's children and families by expanding Medicaid to cover the cost of medically necessary infant and toddler diapers.

We at the Franciscan Center are committed to serving the poor in Hartford. Last year, we served over 40,000 meals. But for us as Franciscans, while charity is important, so is making systemic change to give people a hand up. Expanding Medicaid to cover medically necessary diapers is one of those necessary systemic changes.

As Catholics and Franciscans, we believe that the right to life does not end at birth. Supporting life means standing with families who have chosen life—ensuring that every child, especially those in vulnerable circumstances, has access to the care, dignity, and basic necessities they need to thrive. The choice for life must be met with structures that support life.

H.B. 6937 is about more than Medicaid policy—it is about justice and ensuring that no child suffers because their family cannot afford something as basic as diapers.

What This Bill Would Provide?

H.B. 6937 would expand Connecticut's Medicaid program (HUSKY Health) to cover the cost of diapers for infants and toddlers who require them for medical reasons. Medicaid already covers other essential medical supplies, such as feeding tubes and wheelchairs, because they are necessary for a child's health. Diapers are no different. Without an adequate supply of clean diapers, children are at increased risk of urinary tract infections, diaper dermatitis, and other preventable medical conditions.

By passing this bill, Connecticut would:

- Allow eligible families to access a sufficient monthly supply of diapers through Medicaid, reducing financial stress on low-income households.
- Improve infant and toddler health by preventing infections and reducing unnecessary medical costs associated with untreated diaper need.
- Support parents in maintaining stable employment, as many childcare facilities require families to provide an adequate supply of diapers for enrollment.

For too many families, diapers are not just a necessity but a crisis. Parents who cannot afford diapers often have to leave infants in soiled diapers longer than is safe, leading to infections, illness, and emergency room visits. This bill directly addresses these concerns.

For infants and toddlers:

- Access to clean diapers reduces preventable infections, such as urinary tract infections and diaper dermatitis.
- Fewer missed days from preschool and early childhood education programs due to illness.
- Greater developmental and school readiness, ensuring children start life on equal footing.

For families:

- Parents will miss fewer days of work due to their child's preventable illness.
- Families in economic hardship will no longer have to choose between buying food and buying diapers.
- Medicaid costs may decrease due to fewer emergency room visits and medical interventions.

For the broader community:

- Increased access to early education programs supports childcare businesses and the local economy.
- Ensuring the health of young children reduces long-term social and healthcare costs.
- Investing in children today creates a stronger, more just society tomorrow.

Food-insecure mothers are more than twice as likely as their food-secure peers to report mental health problems, such as stress, depression, and anxiety, while caring for a newborn during the postpartum period. Food-insecure mothers also experience decreased rates of breastfeeding, which can help protect babies against short- and long-term illnesses and disease, such as asthma, obesity, and diabetes.

Access to sufficient diapers also offers health benefits to the mother, as diaper need is associated with both maternal depression and stress. On average, newborn babies can require eight to ten diapers a day, or around 300 a month. Ensuring an adequate supply of diapers helps to prevent avoidable health care utilization and improves overall infant health, as frequent diaper changes are the mainstay of recommendations to prevent diaper rash and urinary tract infections.

Tennessee has already taken an important step in recognizing the necessity of this coverage. In August 2024, the state became the first in the nation to provide Medicaid coverage for diapers through its TennCare program. Families enrolled in Medicaid or CHIP can now access up to 100 diapers per month for children under the age of two at no cost. This initiative directly addresses the financial burden of diaper need and helps prevent health conditions that arise from inadequate diaper supply. ([tennesseelookout.com](https://www.tennesseelookout.com))

If the children of Tennessee need and deserve this essential support, then surely the children of Connecticut do as well. There is no reason for a child in our state to suffer from preventable health issues when a proven, effective solution is within reach.

This is not just a matter of public policy—it is a pressing need. Standing with the poor and advocating for systemic change was a priority of our recent Franciscan Synod. As Franciscans, we are called to serve the most vulnerable and to work for a society where no one is left behind.

Pope Francis reminds us: “A society is all the more human to the degree that it cares effectively for its most frail and suffering members, in a spirit of fraternal love.” (*Fratelli Tutti*, 68)

To care for the most vulnerable is to embody our faith and values of solidarity, justice, and love. Expanding Medicaid to cover medically necessary diapers is a small yet profound way to live out this call.

Supporting H.B. 6937 is not just about policy—it is about dignity, justice, and ensuring that no child starts life at a disadvantage simply because of economic hardship. Connecticut can lead with compassion and common sense by passing this bill.

I urge you to support H.B. 6937 for the well-being of Connecticut’s children, families, and communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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