

## **Testimony in Support of B21-0696**

### **Feminine Hygiene and Diapers Sales Tax Exemption Amendment Act of 2016**

*Corinne Cannon, Founder and Executive Director, DC Diaper Bank [www.dcdiaperbank.org](http://www.dcdiaperbank.org)  
[ccannon@dcdiaperbank.org](mailto:ccannon@dcdiaperbank.org)*

---

Chairperson Evans and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the Feminine Hygiene and Diapers Sales Tax Exemption Amendment Act of 2016, which would remove sales tax from baby diapers, adult diapers, and tampons.

My name is Corinne Cannon and I am the Founder and Executive Director of DC Diaper Bank. We serve 4,000 families in DC, MD and VA and distribute approximately 150,000 diapers each month. We also provide adult diapers and tampons, other essential hygiene items, and food. To date we have distributed nearly 4 million baby diapers to families in need, along with thousands of adult diapers and several thousand pounds of feminine hygiene products. Our vision is to provide basic necessities that aren't covered by government programs, such as Food Stamps and WIC.

Today I am happy to be supporting this bill because, as we know, the fortunes of our children are linked closely to those of women.

Some of the poorest households in our city depend upon a female earner – 32% of female-headed households in DC live in poverty.<sup>1</sup> Overall, women in DC make 90 cents for every dollar that their male peers earn, and the wage gap is far greater for women of color.<sup>2</sup>

Like many jurisdictions, we do not tax food or medicine because we recognize these items as necessities. I would strongly concur with Councilmember Bonds and all the co-sponsors that feminine hygiene products are also necessities. Nobody “treats themselves” to a box of tampons. Imposing a tax on these items is, at its essence, taxing someone for being female. To add insult to injury, we make less than our male counterparts – but we pay more for our basic needs.

Likewise, providing diapers for your baby is not a choice – though I know too many mothers and fathers who are faced every month with the question of buying food or diapers. Adult diapers and incontinence supplies fall into this same category – they are an absolute necessity for many of our elderly neighbors.

With both diapers and feminine hygiene products, not changing them frequently enough – a widely used strategy to stretch the life of an item you cannot afford – carries health risks. Insufficient diaper changes can cause severe diaper rash, urinary tract infections, and other health conditions. Children in a wet diaper are more likely to cry or be irritable, which adds to the stress of being a parent.

---

<sup>1</sup> National Partnership for Women and Families <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/research-library/workplace-fairness/fair-pay/americas-women-and-the-wage-gap.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> National Partnership for Women and Families <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/research-library/workplace-fairness/fair-pay/quantifying-americas-gender-wage-gap.pdf>

Research conducted through Yale University found a correlation between diaper need and maternal depression. This finding is not unlike the results of an industry study in 2010, which found that the inability to provide diapers adversely affects a mother's sense of well-being. As you know, maternal depression leads to a host of bad outcomes for mothers and their children – including poor school readiness and involvement with the child welfare system.

Children's diapers also affect a child and her parents' ability to fully 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.

Likewise, lack of access to adult diapers – and the fear of leaving their home due to incontinence - keeps many struggling residents away from programs designed to provide other essential services.

We see this with menstruation products as well. Days for Girls, a non-profit that works to increase girls school attendance internationally, now distributes feminine pads in the United States, because even here they've found that girls miss class when they have their periods.<sup>3</sup>

I am very proud of our work here in DC to help families parenting in poverty, but the need is far greater than our reach. An adequate supply of diapers costs more than \$100 per month for most of our families. Eliminating sales tax on diapers and feminine hygiene products amounts to a 5.75 percent price drop. Children go through an average of 50 diapers a week or 200 diapers a month. Eliminating the sales tax will allow parents to buy 12 more diapers than they would have been able to otherwise or use the money on other essentials. In an industry study of diaper need, researchers learned from mothers that they most often fell about 10 to 13 diapers short per week, so being able to buy 12 additional diapers each month will reduce a family's average shortfall and help the physical and financial health of families.

Sales tax hits the lowest income families the hardest. Beyond putting more money into the wallets of struggling families, there is a simple question of fairness. We should not tax women for being women. We should not tax parents for keeping their babies healthy and clean. We should not tax the elderly for having a health issue.

Doing away with the sales tax on a few items will not lift families out of poverty in and of itself. But it will provide some small relief. What, how, and who we tax speaks volumes about what we value as a community and a city. Please pass this bill and let us value the health of our babies, the health of our women, and the health and our elderly.

Thank you. I would welcome your questions.

---

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.one.org/us/2016/02/11/why-menstruation-shouldnt-stop-education-period/> and <http://www.daysforgirls.org/where-days-for-girls-serves>