



Assemblywoman Lorena Gonzalez Fletcher, 80th Assembly District

AB 480: Diaper Assistance for CalWORKs Families

IN BRIEF

Assembly Bill 480 would amend the Welfare and Institutions Code to clarify that diapers for infants and toddlers are reimbursable ancillary expense under existing law for CalWORKs participants with young children in the Welfare to Work program.

THE PROBLEM

Diapers are a daily necessity. Depending on their age, children can require five to 10 diaper changes per day. Children need fewer diapers per day as they age, but as the size of the diaper increases, so does the price. Diapers cost up to \$100 per child every month or more depending on where a family is able to purchase them. Despite being critical to the health and hygiene of young children, diapers are not covered in from state and federal assistance such as CalFresh, the Women Infant and Children program (WIC) and Medi-Cal.

A Barrier to Employment

When diapers are unaffordable, their cost creates a barrier between parents and gainful employment. This is why childcare is available to parents in CalWORKs. However, childcare providers require parents to provide a full day's supply of diapers. For low-income parents trying to stay employed or in school, diaper need can be an everyday crisis. Not being able to leave a toddler at childcare because of insufficient diaper supply can disrupt a parent's work activity plan, possibly resulting in sanctions by the county.

CalWORKs is intended to help families become financially self-sufficient and reduce reliance on public assistance, but with daily potential pitfalls such as transportation challenges and diaper supply, it is easy to see how the high price of diapers could have a big cost to the success of our existing programs.

The Hidden Cost of Diaper Need

Missing child care due to diaper need is also a loss for the child themselves and for our future workforce. The opportunity to participate in early education more than doubles a child's likelihood to go on to higher education.

It is documented that families living paycheck-to-paycheck and struggling with necessary expenses are put in the position of changing their children's diapers less often than needed due to a lack of diaper supply. Dirty diapers can cause painful rash, skin infection, blisters and urinary tract infections, all of which are shown to be responsible for more pediatric office and emergency department visits on an annual basis. More medical visits increase costs for the family and the use of subsidized care such as Medi-Cal. Inadequate diapering can also spread viruses and bacteria in public places.

A 2013 study by Yale researchers published in the academic journal *Pediatrics* concluded that "an insufficient supply of diapers is not only a risk factor for poor infant health and child health, but also for maternal mental health." It goes on to say that "an adequate supply of diapers may prove a tangible way of reducing parenting stress, a critical factor influencing child health and development."

THE SOLUTION

Under existing law "necessary supportive services shall be available to every participant" in Welfare to Work so they can stay on track with their job or educational plan. The state deems supportive services so important that participants generally have good cause for not continuing with their job or classes if necessary supportive services are unavailable. The services listed in state code are childcare, transportation costs, and personal counseling. State code also lists ancillary expenses, specifically including "the cost of books, tools, clothing specifically required for the job, fees, and other necessary costs."

If parents do not have enough diapers they will not have childcare, and access to childcare is a number one barrier to work. AB 480 helps to solve the problem of diaper need for those already working hard to make their family economically stable by ensuring that parents can be reimbursed for diapers as an ancillary expense. Clarifying that diapers are a necessary cost is a small investment in the overall success of California's families participating in CalWORKs.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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