

# **Duckworth And Rep. Barbara Lee Urge Senate Leadership To Support Families In Need Of Diapers In Reconciliation Package**

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) and U.S. Representative Barbara Lee (D-CA-13) urged House and Senate leaders to include \$200 million through the Social Services Block Grant to fund a national grant program focused on distributing diapers to millions of families in need in the upcoming

reconciliation package. Duckworth and Lee made their call for additional funding for families in need in a [letter](#) that was cosigned by U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) and U.S. Representatives Jan Schakowsky (D-IL-09), Dwight Evans (D-PA-03), Kaiali‘i Kahele (D-HI-02), Grace Meng (D-NY-06), Terri A. Sewell (D-AL-07) and Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-NJ-12).

“Prior to the COVID-19 public health emergency, 1 in 3 families in the United States struggled to afford enough diapers to keep their child clean, dry, and healthy,” wrote the Members. “This difficulty to afford basic necessities such as diapers has not abated, but rather increased as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially as the SARS-CoV-2 Delta variant continues to lead to a surge of infections. The lack of access to medically necessary products remains a barrier to the health and economic well-being of families across the Nation. As you consider the upcoming reconciliation package, we urge you to include \$200 million through the Social Services Block Grant to fund a national grant program focused on distributing diapers to millions of families in need. Diaper banks will serve as a critical piece of the soft infrastructure portion of the Build Back Better agenda, offering direct support to address the dire needs of caregivers and families.”

They continued: “A diaper distribution program would leverage an existing network of over 200 diaper banks and their more than 5,000 partner agencies across all 50 States, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico. By ensuring the diaper distribution network has an adequate supply of critically needed resources would enable organizations and agencies to scale up their distribution efforts to address a substantial backlog of unmet need and cover regional service gaps, especially in rural areas. This is especially important, as any regions lack a diaper bank altogether.”

Earlier this year, Duckworth hosted a virtual roundtable with several leaders to discuss her bipartisan [End Diaper Need Act](#), which would provide resources to assist working families in addressing their diaper needs. During the roundtable, Duckworth also discussed provisions from the *End Diaper Need Act* that were [included](#) in the American Rescue Plan, as well as how government and organizations can work together in making sure families have access to diapering supplies.

Full text of the letter can be found [here](#) and below.

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader Hoyer, Majority Leader Schumer, Majority Whip Durbin:

Prior to the COVID-19 public health emergency, 1 in 3 families in the United States struggled to afford enough diapers to keep their child clean, dry, and healthy. This difficulty to afford basic necessities such as diapers has not abated, but rather increased as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially as the SARS-CoV-2 Delta variant

continues to lead to a surge of infections. The lack of access to medically necessary products remains a barrier to the health and economic well-being of families across the Nation. As you consider the upcoming reconciliation package, we urge you to include \$200 million through the Social Services Block Grant to fund a national grant program focused on distributing diapers to millions of families in need. Diaper banks will serve as a critical piece of the soft infrastructure portion of the Build Back Better agenda, offering direct support to address the dire needs of caregivers and families.

In the past 18 months, diaper banks across the country have seen double, triple, or even up to eight-fold increases in the numbers of diapers distributed to families struggling to get by, reflecting a level of need that has not abated since the early days of the pandemic. While diaper banks and other non-profits took swift and innovative action to meet the needs of their communities, additional support is necessary to address the unparalleled percentage of unmet diaper need exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In many cases, diaper banks need to increase distribution by another 50 to 150 percent to address the known need in their communities.

Infants and toddlers without access to an adequate supply of clean diapers risk skin infections, open sores, urinary tract infections, and other painful medical conditions. Most childcare centers will not accept children that do not provide an adequate supply of diapers for their child, preventing many low-income families from finding childcare services and hindering them from accepting job opportunities. This cycle of diaper need has forced many low-income families to ration their supply of diapers, at the expense of their economic security and their children's health.

Congress must address this barrier and support families through an expanded partnership of diaper distribution networks with the Federal government. Ensuring families have access to diapers has been proven to be an incredibly efficient and cost-effective method to improving the health and well-being of parents and children across the country. Research has shown that the combined benefits of improved child health and parental workforce participation attributed to addressing diaper need yield an \$11 return for each dollar invested in a diaper bank's distribution<sup>1</sup>.

A diaper distribution program would leverage an existing network of over 200 diaper banks and their more than 5,000 partner agencies across all 50 States, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico. By ensuring the diaper distribution network has an adequate supply of critically needed resources would enable organizations and agencies to scale up their distribution efforts to address a substantial backlog of unmet need and cover regional service gaps, especially in rural areas. This is especially important, as any regions lack a diaper bank altogether.

Allocating \$200 million to the Social Services Block Grant for the purposes of creating a diaper distribution grant program would provide much-needed resources targeted towards addressing diaper need. Funding for this program would alleviate as much as 40 percent of preCOVID-19 diaper need and yield a massive return on investment for children, families, and communities across the Nation. The flexible nature of the Social Services Block Grant would enable States to quickly implement available funding to support existing programs and services networks.

Thank you for your consideration of this request, and we look forward to continuing working with you in ensuring that our Nation's next generation is provided a healthy start through the Build Back Better agenda.

Sincerely,