



Maine Equal Justice
People Policy Solutions

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Testimony on Behalf of Maine Equal Justice *in support of* LD 287, An Act to Support Parents by Providing a Sales Tax Exemption for Diapers.

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Good afternoon Senator Grohoski, Representative Perry, and members of the Taxation Committee. My name is Ann Danforth and I use she/her pronouns. I'm a Policy Advocate at Maine Equal Justice, a nonprofit legal aid provider working to increase economic security, opportunity, and equity for people in Maine.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of LD 287, An Act to Support Parents by Providing a Sales Tax Exemption for Diapers.

Families in Maine are struggling

Maine Equal Justice has seen first-hand that families across the state, and in particular, families with low income, are still suffering from the economic impacts of the pandemic. According to the most recent Census data, more than 1 in 10 (11.5%) Mainers were in poverty in 2021¹ – that is, a family of four living below \$27,479 annually.² That's a little over \$500 a week.

Record high inflation coupled with high energy costs, a pre-existing and worsening housing crisis, rising food costs coupled with the imminent loss of SNAP emergency allotments, and the upcoming unwinding of continuous enrollment for MaineCare members are huge factors stretching Maine families and their budgets.^{3 4}

People should not have to choose between food, rent, and other basic necessities like diapers

Diapers typically cost families up to \$100 per month per child.⁵ Access to diapers is critical for child and maternal health as well as parent's ability to work. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities:

¹ <https://data.census.gov/table?q=poverty+maine&tid=ACSST1Y2021.S1701>

² <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2022/demo/p60-277.pdf>

³ <https://www.newscentermaine.com/article/money/business/maine-daily-cost-of-inflation-gas-stations-coffee-shops-grocery-stores-greenhouses-during-covid19-pandemic-ukraine-war/97-d2e93f51-49b7-4d50-b4e2-8c2bf0b2677b>

⁴ <https://www.mainepublic.org/business-and-economy/2022-11-29/maine-heating-oil-prices-dip-from-record-highs>

⁵

<https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.cbpp.org/research/family-income-support/end-diaper-need-and-period-poverty-families-need-cash-assistance-to&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1676322479028901&usg=AOvVaw32nSz07HaSbd9-MtH2Qy7o>

- Families facing financial challenges may keep diapers on for too long or empty solids and reuse disposable diapers, resulting in rashes, urinary tract infections, or worse.⁶
- Many child care providers require parents to provide diapers each day. At one diaper bank, 56 percent of parents who needed child care to go to work reported missing work because they lacked diapers.⁷
- Diaper need has implications for maternal health as well – one study of 296 low-income women found a correlation between diaper need and maternal depression.⁸ A study by Yale University researchers concluded that an adequate supply of diapers could reduce parenting stress.⁹

For many low-income families, disposable diapers are the only option because they have limited access to laundry facilities to use cloth diapers.

The high cost of diapers often falls hardest on mothers, who are more likely to be caring for young children. Inflation has only made diapers even more expensive, with demand at diaper banks increasing since the start of the pandemic.¹⁰

Furthermore, many public benefits designed to help low income mothers, like SNAP and WIC, do not cover the cost of diapers.

Maine can adopt tax policies that can help ease this burden on low income families

Maine’s tax code distinguishes between taxable items and non-taxable necessities like groceries and medical supplies. One of the policy principles underlying this differentiation is that there are some purchases that people must make to stay healthy. Recognizing that sales tax is regressive in that it takes a larger percentage of income from low-income taxpayers than from high-income taxpayers, many states exempt certain products from sales tax. We believe this same principle should apply to the taxation of diapers, as was recently applied to menstrual products following the same rationale. Maine has the opportunity to join states such as Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Iowa, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, and more, to get rid of the state sales tax on diapers.¹¹

Conclusion

We appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony in support of LD 287. Thank you, and please feel free to reach out to me with any questions or concerns.

⁶ <https://www.cbpp.org/research/family-income-support/end-diaper-need-and-period-poverty-families-need-cash-assistance-to>

⁷ <https://nationaldiaperbanknetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/The-Social-and-Economic-Impacts-of-the-Diaper-Bank-of-Connecticut.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5657130/>

⁹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3727676/>

¹⁰ <https://www.cnn.com/2021/04/23/business/diaper-costs-families-poverty/index.html>

¹¹

<https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2022/07/21/as-prices-rise-the-push-to-end-diaper-taxes-grows>