

Allowing diapers and menstrual products to be purchased through SNAP and WIC would provide relief to struggling Marylanders

Position Statement Supporting House Bill 87

Given before the House Appropriations Committee

In a time of high inflation and economic uncertainty, allowing Marylanders to use their Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) benefits to purchase diapers or menstrual hygiene products would have a lasting impact on the lives of many struggling Marylanders. This would provide economic relief for low-income Marylanders struggling to keep up with rising inflation and the already high cost of essentials such as diapers and menstrual products. For these reasons, **the Maryland Center on Economic Policy supports House Bill 87.**

Even with the help of safety net programs like SNAP and WIC, too many Marylanders struggle to afford basic needs. Period poverty, a term used to describe a person's inability to afford or access menstrual products to be healthy, increased by 35% between 2018 and 2021 according to a study by U by Kotex®.ⁱ Two in five people in the U.S. struggled to purchase menstrual products due to a lack of income, and many report that the COVID-19 pandemic made it harder to access such products. In turn, this struggle can disrupt a person's life such that they have to be absent from school or work, and can also impact their physical, mental and emotional health.ⁱⁱ Although Maryland does not impose a tax on period supplies, SNAP and WIC recipients already demonstrate financial need due to their low-income status and would greatly benefit from expanding the type of products they can purchase with their existing benefits.

In addition to their continuous use, diapers also pose a substantial expense for families. Nationwide and on average, parents spend \$100 a month on diapers per child.ⁱⁱⁱ Diaper need, or the struggle to afford sufficient diapers for children to be clean and healthy, poses significant issues for parents:

- Parents are often expected to provide diapers to their childcare providers, leading some of them to stay at home with their child due to their inability to provide them.
- Families may ration diapers and delay diaper changes, resulting in rashes or urinary tract infections for children among other physical concerns.
- Parents are forced to choose between basic necessities and may forego spending their income on essentials for themselves to be able to provide diapers for their children .

Although some mothers report accessing diapers through shelters and community resources such as diaper banks to supplement their purchases, they should be able to have a reliable source of supply.^{iv} It is especially important that parents have the support to provide stability for their children given that 15.2% of Maryland children under the age of five lived below the poverty level in 2021 (\$26,500 for a family of four).^v Research also shows that ensuring families have an adequate supply of diapers helps children sleep better and thus helps produce favorable developmental outcomes.^{vi}

It does not help that the prices of both diapers and menstrual hygiene products has risen. Reports show that the cost of diapers have increased by 22% since 2018,^{vii} and some menstrual products were up by 10% as of mid-year 2022.^{viii} While these numbers can be attributed, in part, to supply-chain issues caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the issue of rapidly rising material goods is showing no signs of dissipating. Allowing SNAP and WIC recipients to purchase basic essentials such as diapers and menstrual products through their benefits is necessary to account for these rapid changes, so that Marylanders can live and meet their bio-psycho-social needs.

House Bill 87 is an important step in helping more low-income families afford necessary products. If the U.S. Department of Agriculture approves the waiver for SNAP and WIC recipients to purchase diapers and menstrual products, the Maryland Department of Human Services should apply for such waiver that will create more economic security for these families in need.

For these reasons, the Maryland Center on Economic Policy respectfully requests that the Appropriations Committee give a favorable report to House Bill 87.

Equity Impact Analysis: House Bill 87

Bill summary

House Bill 87 requires the Maryland Department of Human Services to apply for a waiver that, if approved by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, will allow Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) recipients to purchase diapers and menstrual hygiene products with their benefits.

Background

Diapers and menstrual hygiene products are deemed as nonessential yet this is far from the truth. The reality is that both diaper and period products are needed frequently by millions of families with young children and people who menstruate. This constant need for such supplies places a financial burden on low-income families who often have to carefully budget to meet their basic necessities, and even then, some families are unable to afford or access these products. With the rising cost of living and inflation driving the increase of prices for material goods, it is likely that many families will continue to struggle in the foreseeable future.

The inability to afford diapers for children or to access menstrual products pose significant alterations in the lives of many individuals and families. From threatening job security to impacting physical health, diaper need and period poverty should be strongly taken into consideration as a problem that needs to be solved with quick and

smart policy changes. Applying for the waiver that might enable SNAP and WIC recipients to purchase diapers and menstrual hygiene products would greatly benefit Marylanders.

Equity Implications

Policies in the past have led to a system of unequal opportunities for marginalized groups within Maryland. Although the most obvious racially discriminatory policies have long been overturned or mitigated, the impact of these policies continue to persist in both society and public policy and have led to significant racial and health disparities. People of color experience much higher rates of economic insecurity and poverty and are more likely to use SNAP and WIC or other economic relief programs to afford basic necessities. In particular, single-parent households, women, and children of color are overrepresented among families living in poverty. Period poverty and diaper need are also disproportionately experienced by Black and Latinx people.

Research shows that increasing economic security for households through programs like SNAP and WIC can help reduce overall poverty, child poverty, and racial and ethnic inequities. Authorizing families to purchase diapers and menstrual hygiene products through their SNAP and WIC benefits will enable this program to better meet participants' needs. Ensuring people can meet their basic needs strengthens our economy and can dismantle the economic barriers that too often hold back Marylanders of color.

Impact

House Bill 87 would likely **improve racial and economic equity** in Maryland.

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- ⁱ “New Study by U by Kotex® shows 35% Increase in Period Poverty Since 2018,” <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/new-study-by-u-by-kotex-shows-35-increase-in-period-poverty-since-2018-301297210.html>
- ⁱⁱ “End Diaper Need and Period Poverty: Families Need Cash Assistance to Meet Basic Needs,” <https://www.cbpp.org/research/family-income-support/end-diaper-need-and-period-poverty-families-need-cash-assistance-to>
- ⁱⁱⁱ “Diaper Dilemma: Low Income Families Face High Costs and Limited Supplies of an Essential Good,” Institute for Research on Poverty, 2022, <https://www.irp.wisc.edu/resource/diaper-dilemma-low-income-families-face-high-costs-and-limited-supplies-of-an-essential-good/>
- ^{iv} Marti-Castaner, M., Pavlenko, T., Engel, R., Sanchez, K., Crawford A.E., Brroks-Gunn, J., & Wimer, C. (2022). Poverty after birth: How mothers experience and navigate U.S. safety net programs to address family needs. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 31, 2248–2265. <https://doi-org.proxy.lib.umich.edu/10.1007/s10826-022-02322-0>
- ^v Source: Census Bureau, American Community Survey data 1-year estimates from 2021
- ^{vi} Shaffer, E., Porter, S., Condon, E., Zha, P., & Caldwell, B.A. (2022). Associations between diaper need and child sleep in under-resourced families. *Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics*, 43 (7), 402-408. doi:10.1097/DBP.0000000000001088
- ^{vii} “Diaper Dilemma: Low Income Families Face High Costs and Limited Supplies of an Essential Good,” Institute for Research on Poverty, 2022, <https://www.irp.wisc.edu/resource/diaper-dilemma-low-income-families-face-high-costs-and-limited-supplies-of-an-essential-good/>
- ^{viii} “It’s getting more expensive to have your period, thanks to inflation,” <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-06-09/inflation-is-pushing-tampon-prices-up-10>