



CAFCA

Connecticut Association
for Community Action

February 19, 2020 Public Hearing Testimony before the Connecticut General Assembly Appropriations Committee

Governor's Proposed Midterm Budget Adjustments Department of Social Services

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Distinguished Chairpersons, Vice-Chairpersons, Ranking Members, and Members, my name is Deb Polun and I am the new Executive Director of the Connecticut Association for Community Action (CAFCA), the state association that works with Connecticut's nine Community Action Agencies (CAAs), the state and federal designated antipoverty agencies.

I am here to discuss the Governor's proposed budget, especially the portion of the budget that deals with our line item: Human Services Infrastructure (HSI) - Community Action Program (CAP) in the Department of Social Services (DSS) budget. I want all of you to know how important the Human Services Infrastructure-Community Action Program funds are to our CAA network.

As the largest statewide safety net service provider, Connecticut's network of Community Action Agencies connect neighbors in need with resources that stabilize and improve lives and communities. These services and resources include, but are not limited to:

- Nutrition (SNAP, Meals on Wheels, Congregate Meals for older adults);
- Housing and shelter;
- Asset development and financial literacy;
- Energy and heating assistance; and,
- Early childhood care and education.

HSI-CAP is the "core funding" for Community Action Agencies, and utilizes a comprehensive, customer-focused, integrated service delivery system approach. This means that anyone can go to a Community Action Agency for any reason and get connected to the programs, services, and resources they need to thrive. Through holistic case management services as well as information and referral to community, local, state, and federal organizations, we helped 259,512 of your constituents last year across the state solve problems, avoid crises, and save money – and develop short and long-term plans for economic success.

Additionally, HSI-CAP is used to help support other funding streams and grants that have little or no administrative funds. And, since the State made this budgetary commitment over 30 years ago, our Community Action Network has remained dedicated to partnering with you and state agencies to work on behalf of those across Connecticut who are the most vulnerable to the harsh impact of poverty. This successful partnership was crucial in developing the efficient and effective statewide system that is used to serve the state's poorest residents. As a result, our agencies have a long history of being well-known and trusted in the communities they serve as the place to turn when people are struggling.

Our network's success in providing antipoverty programs and services is also paralleled by our reporting transparency and accountability. We are one of the only service provider networks in Connecticut to use a Results Based Accountability (RBA) framework like the one the legislature has endorsed for years. All Community Action Agencies track, analyze, measure, and report meaningful customer, agency, and community outcomes and results – ensuring a positive return on investment for the network and the state. Our 2019 Annual Report highlights the work we did last year and can be found at www.cafca.org.

The network would like to thank the Administration for providing HSI-CAP with an increase this year. A smart investment in our human service delivery system, HSI-CAP is used as a state match for federal funds, which essentially doubles its value. Last year, for every \$1 of HSI funds used, our network leveraged \$68.48 for programs to help our state's families and communities. That's an additional \$205 million in local, federal and private funds for needed programs and services.

Finally, it is important to note that the President's budget proposal eliminates three core funding streams for Community Action: Community Services Block Grant (CSBG); Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP); and, Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP). As you know, any cuts to these programs would have a devastating effect on the people we serve every day. We appreciate the continued support of our federal congressional delegation, the Administration, Department of Social Services, and state legislators in our efforts.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and for understanding the key role Community Action Agencies play in the lives of those facing financial hardship here in Connecticut. We look forward to working with you and the Administration to continue serving our state's neediest residents.