



CAFCA
Connecticut Association
for Community Action

**March 26, 2021 Public Hearing Testimony before the
Connecticut General Assembly's
Appropriations Committee**

In support of

Senate Bill 340: An Act Concerning Funding for Housing Services

Distinguished Chairpersons, Vice-Chairpersons, Ranking Members, and Members, my name is Deb Polun, and I am the Executive Director for the Connecticut Association for Community Action (CAFCA), the state association that works with Connecticut's nine Community Action Agencies (CAAs), the state and federally designated antipoverty agencies serving nearly 200,000 low- and moderate-income people in all 169 cities and towns across the state.

I am writing to express our support for Senate Bill 340, *An Act Concerning Funding for Housing Services*.

CAAs connect their customers to essential programs and services like employment and training, housing and shelter, energy and heating assistance, early childhood care and education, asset development, and food and nutrition. Through a holistic, comprehensive, multigenerational approach, CAAs work with those in need to plan, achieve, and maintain a realistic path to short and long-term economic self-sufficiency.

Connecticut's Community Action Agencies know and understand the critical role housing plays in addressing and reducing intergenerational poverty (especially childhood poverty) and increasing economic mobility. Children who live in safe and stable homes are also more likely to succeed in school and have access to opportunities that help them learn both in and outside of the classroom.¹

Over the past few years, Connecticut has ramped up its coordinated, focused effort to reduce and address homelessness – and is starting to see results. Last year's Point in Time (PIT) Count, a one-day, unduplicated count of sheltered and unsheltered homeless individuals and families, recorded nearly 3,000 Connecticut residents experiencing homelessness. That represents a 35% decrease from 2007. Additionally, the number of people using the state's shelter system has decreased by 42% from 2012.

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¹ "The Problem." National Low Income Housing Coalition. Available at: <https://nlihc.org/explore-issues/why-we-care/problem>

Nonprofit organizations like Community Action Agencies who provide homelessness and housing-related services are the key drivers of this change. CAA services include, but are not limited to, affordable housing, emergency shelters, supportive housing, rental assistance, rapid re-housing, Section 8 application assistance, housing the homeless, landlord mediation, and case management.

Frontline staff at CAAs and other nonprofits are integral to this work. They meet with struggling individuals and families to ensure they are safe, stable, and housed, and assess and address other needs to help them move toward economic stability. To foster their success in helping Connecticut's most vulnerable and at-risk residents, frontline staff need living wages, overtime, hazard pay and benefits, manageable client caseload sizes, professional development, and adequate technology.

With Connecticut's minimum wage increasing each year from 2019 through 2023, all businesses will face additional costs, including Community Action Agencies. We are not only increasing wages for our lowest paid employees, but we also must address "wage compression," and provide increases to those employees earning slightly above minimum wage. ***As grant-funded nonprofit organizations, state funding enhancements are the only way to meet these goals.***

Additionally, as we continue to deal with the adverse effects of the pandemic, another crisis looms: the very real possibility that many people in Connecticut will be evicted from their homes when the moratorium is lifted in April, or when they lose their homes in foreclosure. It is critical that more funding be directed to support homelessness and housing-related services, and S.B. 340 does just that.

In closing, I strongly urge you to support this important bill. Thank you for raising it and for your time and consideration.