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Legislative Informational Forum
ARRA Weatherization Funds
Written Testimony - May 4, 2009

The Access Community Action Agency is one the five current providers of Weatherization Assistance Program services to low-income homes in CT.

As far as the portion of the Weatherization program Access operates and the ARRA funding proposed in the state Plan, here are some important facts:

- For the past 15 years, as the sole Weatherization sub-grantee for all of Windham, Tolland and New London Counties, Access has consistently met or surpassed goals set by DSS that establish the number of units to weatherize.
- Access currently operates the largest Weatherization Program in CT - both in units weatherized and total funds expended.
- Over the upcoming three-year period, eastern CT's proposed \$6M Weatherization funding will result in an average of *five additional units weatherized per week*. That's one unit each weekday. If the portion of the \$20M slated for DECD were be allocated to the CAAs, an additional \$4.8M would likely come to CT. That would increase the average to less than two units per day. Given Access's long outstanding record, it is simply inaccurate and misleading to suggest as some have that Access's ability to meet this increased demand is "highly suspect".
- Consistent with the proposed State Plan, to ensure that the increased demand for Weatherization services will be met, preliminary planning meetings have been held with TVCCA - the Community Action Agency located in New London County, the Eastern Workforce Investment Board and Quinnibaug Community College. A draft written plan was developed and shared with TVCCA as to how we might work together to achieve the targeted results. Again, it is misleading and inaccurate to suggest as some have that Access is unwilling to partner with TVCCA to do so. Not giving an organization everything they want does not equal an unwillingness to partner with them.
- Although the State Plan does not specify this, some believe that the funding for entire regions should be subcontracted to organizations that have not conducted weatherization work for 15 years. It is in direct contradiction to what both the Legislature and the Governor have consistently said is needed during these difficult economic times - consolidation of administrative functions, not creation of duplicative structures as this approach would require.
- What will ensure the highest quality and best use of these funds is a structure that allows partners to work with the regional expert and sub-grantee – in eastern CT that's Access – to enhance our regional capacity while allowing Access to maintain quality control of both eligibility and work quality – both of which Access will be responsible for as the sub-grantee.

Regarding, the distribution formula in the plan, Access believes DSS is right to allocate \$28.5M of the ARRA funds to the existing Weatherization providers. However, we have concerns about how DSS plans to allocate the remaining \$38.8M, particularly \$20M designated for DECD. This raises the following concerns:

- Federal Department of Energy statute and regulations* require preferences and sets us procedures that favor experienced, effective W.A.P program operators. It appears that those procedures and preferences have not been observed.

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- DoE regulation requires that *before* awarding any weatherization work to other than a current provider, a formal procedure must be followed that results in a finding that the current provider is *not* capable of performing the work. No such process is reflected in the plan and as far as we know, no such process has taken place.
- Because DoE regulations do not allow WAP work on units where utilities are included in the rent, we believe public housing units do not qualify. While an exception could be granted if it is shown that the benefits of the program “accrue primarily to the low income tenants residing in such units”, this plan does not show that.

As the recognized Weatherization expert operating in New London, Windham and Tolland what is often a complex program, Access takes very seriously its responsibility, and has unwavering confidence that we will continue to ensure the highest program standards and workmanship are maintained in the future.

Access is ready, willing, qualified and has the capacity to embrace this unique opportunity to work with our partners to help move eastern CT toward increased energy independence and family economic stability.

Submitted by:

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(*Federal DoE Statute 10 CFR 400.15)