Connecticut Community Action

Testimony

May 21, 2009

Good morning Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian and committee members. My name is Joe Mann and I am the Vice-Chair of the Connecticut Association for Community Action (CAFCA) and President/CEO of Norwalk Economic Opportunity Now, Inc (NEON). CAFCA is the state association for Connecticut's 12 Community Action Agencies which serve all 169 towns and cities in the state and NEON is the Community Action Agency serving towns and cities in mid-Fairfield County.

I am here this morning to express my support for the Department of Social Services' plan on the Community Services Block Grant plan as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act 2009. As you know, the Community Action Network represents the nation's officially designated anti-poverty agencies, and it is our responsibility to provide direct services and case management to CT's low-income children, our elderly and disabled and working poor families. These CSBG funds provide the bedrock support to our agencies in providing critical programs to our most vulnerable residents.

Right now, due to the worst economy the state has witnessed since the Great Depression, our agencies are seeing a dire need for assistance to Connecticut families including help with fuel, food and other forms of aid - the highest levels we have ever seen. People who have never sought relief from our CAAs before are coming to our door for help. Just in energy assistance requests alone, almost 30,000 new customers statewide have come to our agencies for help paying their heating bills – while in our agencies they are requesting job search help because they've lost their jobs, eviction prevention help, and food

assistance. These people are in desperate need of all support services our agencies offer! Our workers are on the front-line in providing these services and, thankfully, we have the information and the expertise needed to provide comprehensive support to meet many of these needs.

The CAAs are unique in our ability to serve as "one stop centers" for many services, such as: heating; food assistance services; credit repair and money management; free tax preparation and asset development; utility matching payment plan; child care and Head Start; elderly nutrition, meals on wheels and homemaker services for the elderly which helps keep our senior citizens at home and out of much more expensive nursing homes. As our Results –Based Reporting indicates, you cannot get a better return on investment than with dollars spent in Community Action Agency through the programs we offer. (Please see copies of CAFCA's annual report).

Each year as part of the CSBG process, our agencies put together a 'Community Action Plan' that specifically looks at the needs of each of our 12 regions. This stimulus funding will help our agencies in addressing the identified needs of our communities at this critical time and will help us to continue to provide the case management services that can respond to these needs. Also, these funds help provide operational support for programs that have inadequate funds for the administration of many programs, such as energy assistance and child care.

At a recent meeting with the CT Congressional delegation in Washington, our federal elected officials expressed their strong desire that these CSBG funds be distributed to the Community Action Agencies and that this happen in a timely manner so that the emergency needs of our communities could be met and jobs created as quickly as possible. Additionally, they noted that they intentionally used a number of the formula-based funding streams for the 'stimulus' funding, such as the Community Services Block Grant and directed that 99% of this grant go directly to our agencies because they have confidence in the current system

and the operators, i.e. the Community Action Agency Network. They further stated that they have faith that these crucial funds will quickly get out to the low-income communities as intended and for the purposes of the funding – job creation and strengthening communities – important initiatives of the Obama administration. We appreciate the confidence expressed by our congressional representatives and can assure you we will do all that is possible to justify that confidence.

I would like to thank the legislature, especially members of this committee, for your understanding of the importance of supporting the CAAs - CT's federally designated anti-poverty agencies – and the work we do for our most vulnerable residents. Your ongoing support has been crucial to our successes in serving CT's poor residents.

We have a number of community action agency executive directors here today who would be happy to answer any of your questions.