



Connecticut Community Action Partnerships that work. Results that matter.

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February 11, 2010 Public Hearing Testimony before the
Connecticut General Assembly Appropriations Committee

H. B. 5018: AN ACT MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE EXPENDITURES AND REVENUES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2011.

Madam Chairwoman, Mister Chairman, distinguished Vice-Chairpersons and Ranking Members, and honorable members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is James Gatling. I am the Board Chair of the Connecticut Association For Community Action (CAFCA) and President/CEO of New Opportunities, Inc. CAFCA is the state association for Connecticut's twelve (12) Community Action Agencies—or "CAA"s—which serve all 169 towns and cities in the state; New Opportunities is the CAA serving twenty-six (26) towns and cities in North-Central Connecticut.

Community Action Agencies Protect Connecticut's Families... and Connecticut's Economy

We strongly oppose the Governor's proposed \$1.2 million cut to the Human Service Infrastructure Community Action Program—or "HSI"—line item within the Department of Social Services. The Human Service Infrastructure is a customer-focused, integrated service delivery system. The HSI line item is the bedrock funding that allows Connecticut's CAAs—our state's federally-designated anti-poverty agencies—to provide direct services and case management to low-income children, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and working poor families *in every one of Connecticut's communities*. There is no denying that a balanced approach—including cost savings—is necessary in light of our state's current and projected deficits, but the Governor suggested false savings by proposing cuts to the HSI.

In your communities and mine, the HSI helps families survive. Among so many other accomplishments, the HSI allows parents to work, unemployed persons to receive job training, and low-income families to cut their energy costs. Our *proven* programs help to level the playing field and keep families afloat. You see, when families hit rock-bottom, we all pay the bill. We pay the bill in our hospitals, nursing homes, schools, courts, and other services. We pay it in declining home values and in a diminished quality of life. The CAAs' comprehensive system and programs *prevent* families from hitting rock-bottom, and our state from having to bear those unnecessary, exorbitant costs.

Community Action Works

Let me underscore that our defense of the HSI is not just a plea—it's also a pledge. As we ask you to recognize our critical role, we pledge to you, to Connecticut's taxpayers, and to our hundreds of thousands of customers that we will continue to use rigorous program evaluation to effect continuous improvement and show that the HSI remains a prudent public investment.

In keeping with our tradition of accountability, I have attached our Results-Based Accountability Report to this testimony. Additionally, I am pleased to highlight the following results achieved by the CAAs in 2008. Data from 2009 are being collected and compiled as we speak.

How much did we do?

- More than 294,000 people in more than 152,000 families benefited from CAA services.
- More than 55,000 people received referrals to other necessary services.

How well did we do it?

- CAAs leveraged approximately \$20 for every dollar of baseline funding.
- Volunteers contributed more than 700,000 hours of work (the equivalent of 336 full-time employees) to the fight against poverty.
- Over \$11.3 million were returned to our state's economy through free tax preparation assistance.

Is anyone better off?

- More than 6,560 people obtained employment.
- Nearly 33,000 senior citizens maintained independent, active lifestyles.
- More than 14,000 people learned about financial literacy and energy conservation.
- More than 7,400 pre-school-aged children are better prepared to start school.
- Kids did better in school—academically, socially, emotionally, and athletically.
- More than 2,600 households gained safer, more stable housing.
- More than 10,500 households received emergency shelter.

The \$4 million previously appropriated for the HSI are critical to Connecticut's families. Today's fiscal and social challenges are daunting. On a daily basis, we receive requests from families who have never before asked for help. The answer must include supporting CAAs because our network is tried and true; we prove year after year that we are a smart investment to help keep Connecticut's families self-sufficient, and to protect our state from being burdened with far greater, unnecessary social and economic costs.

As is, Connecticut's financial support of our CAAs has decreased dramatically—from a high of \$8.2 million in 1992 to today's \$4 million—even as we are asked to do more for the state's low-income children and families. Your preservation of a baseline of support has been critical, and we urge you to recommit yourselves to protecting our state's most vulnerable residents.

In closing, I thank you for your support, and stress that we are always willing to collaborate with you and others in the service of our great state. I would be happy to take your questions.