



**September 22, 2010 Public Hearing Testimony before the  
Connecticut General Assembly  
Appropriations, Human Services, and Public Health Committees**

**COMMUNITY SERVICES BLOCK GRANT ALLOCATION PLAN FFY 2011**

Distinguished Chairpersons, Vice-Chairpersons, Ranking Members, and Members of the Appropriations, Human Services, and Public Health Committees:

Thank you for holding this hearing on the proposed Community Services Block Grant Allocation Plan for FFY 2011. My name is Joe Mann. I am the President/CEO of Norwalk Economic Opportunity Now or NEON and Board Vice-Chair of the Connecticut Association for Community Action (CAFCA). CAFCA is the state association for Connecticut's twelve (12) Community Action Agencies (CAAs)—our state's federally-designated anti-poverty agencies, which serve every one of Connecticut's 169 towns and cities.

As you know, the CSBG provides critical operational support for programs—including energy assistance and child care—that have inadequate administration funds. Additionally, these funds help our CAAs to provide a comprehensive, integrated customer-focused approach, which is greatly needed as our residents struggle to make ends meet in the ongoing recession.

CAAs accept customers at any contact point and guide them through a complex service system, ensuring the most efficient and cost-effective delivery of services, and the best use of taxpayer dollars. The result is improved client outcomes across all state- and federally-funded programs, underscoring the value of integrating diverse funding streams at the local level. As shown by the accomplishments noted in the enclosed packet, investment in Connecticut's CAAs is not just a short-term fix—it is an investment in Connecticut's future.

Certainly, to those families directly affected by the troubled economy, the State's investment in CAAs has never been more important. But the investment is in fact a critical step toward stabilizing the economy for *all* of Connecticut's residents. Since the recession began nearly three years ago, CAAs have witnessed an unparalleled surge in the number of customers seeking assistance and the level of need among our customers. In energy assistance alone, we have seen a more-than-30% increase not only in applications, but in eligible customers, too.

And, in light of growing research showing that effective assistance programs work best in conjunction with each other, CAFCA is launching our innovative Automated Benefits

Calculator, or “ABC.” ABC is a user-friendly, web-based feature that allows users to anonymously enter information and find out whether they might qualify for state or federal assistance programs. Available in English and Spanish, ABC presents a short, self-guided series of questions, then provides an array of valuable information, including likely eligibility and guidance to the appropriate CAA and other resources. Also, when a customer visits a CAA for energy assistance (the most common gateway for families in need), integrated ABC software provides a real-time, “one-stop shopping” eligibility report for other programs. With expansion likely in the future, ABC’s list of programs already includes the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), health care, Head Start, and many more. CAFCA is committed to empowering families to get back on their feet.

Especially at this time of economic uncertainty, we are grateful to policy makers at the federal and state levels for the trust they have given us, but understanding our efficacy doesn’t require a leap of faith. CAAs employ a Results-Based Accountability (RBA) framework called Results-Oriented Management and Accountability, or ROMA. By using ROMA, we are able to measure customer, agency, and community outcomes for the purposes of reporting to stakeholders and pursuing continuous improvement in our administration, coordination, and service delivery. Please see the attached handout for an RBA report on a number of our programs.

Additionally, Connecticut’s CAAs undertake the Quality Community Action Assessment developed and administered by the Northeast Institute for Quality Community Action (NIQCA) to ensure high standards in governance and management. Every three years, each agency undergoes a self-assessment process that encompasses the entirety of their infrastructure—finance, human resources, management information systems, board governance and accountability, planning and development, and facilities. A peer review group analyzes each agency and develops an action plan for continuous improvement based on relevant best practices.

Beyond being accountable to our customers, partners, and local communities for delivering effective, efficient anti-poverty assistance, our network has offered its partnership on other initiatives that might be helpful as the State seeks to cut costs while protecting struggling families. We continue to extend our sincere interest in discussing ways the CAA network might partner with the state to better serve customers and save state funds: Some examples of such partnerships include:

- Pre-application/application assistance for major DSS cash assistance programs and re-determination;
- Outreach, education, and application assistance for federally-funded programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance program (SNAP) and HUSKY;
- Pre-employment services to provide individuals with the skills and paperwork necessary to complete job applications;
- Fiduciary agency for small community-based organizations (CBOs), using a master contracting concept to lessen unnecessary and duplicative paperwork, increase timely payments, and support pilot programs;
- Supportive services that maintain independence for elders; and

- Energy assistance eligibility data to be used as a basis for categorical eligibility for DSS programs (similar to Head Start eligibility being presumptive eligibility for HUSKY).

I thank DSS and the General Assembly—especially the committees represented here today—for understanding the importance of supporting the good work and continuous improvement of Connecticut’s Community Action Agencies. As a network and with our partners, we are deeply committed to empowering people and building communities, and these have never been more necessary efforts than they are now.

Again, thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to take your questions.

(Enclosure: RBA report)

