



**September 3, 2014 Public Hearing Testimony before the
Connecticut General Assembly
Appropriations, Human Services, and Public Health Committees**

COMMUNITY SERVICES BLOCK GRANT ALLOCATION PLAN FFY 2015

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 (CSBG) Allocation Plan for FFY 2015. My name is Deborah Monahan. I am the Executive Director of the Thames Valley Council for Community Action (TVCCA) and Vice Chair of the Connecticut Association for Community Action (CAFCA). CAFCA is the state association for Connecticut's ten (10) Community Action Agencies (CAAs), which are the state and federal designated anti-poverty agencies that serve every one of Connecticut's 169 cities and towns.

We are pleased to be here to support Commissioner Bremby and the Department of Social Services' FFY 2015 allocation plan for CSBG. As you know, this block grant provides critical, operational support for many essential programs and services that have inadequate administrative funds. These funds help our agencies provide a comprehensive, customer-focused, integrated service delivery approach for our clients. Our network's holistic approach of 'no wrong door'—meaning customers are accepted at any contact point and guided through a complex service system— helps to lift them out of poverty and put them on a path to self-sufficiency.

Although it has been six years since the economic recession hit, our CAAs continue to see an increase in the demand for services in communities across the state. According to newly-revised figures from the Bureau of Economic Analysis, Connecticut's economy is showing positive—yet extremely moderate—economic growth,¹ and our state's personal income growth in 2013 was 2.11%. Though slightly up from last year, that increase represents a growth rate of nearly half a percentage point lower than the national average for all states² and there has been no economic growth at the low-income, working poor level. As a matter of fact, we are losing our middle class and more individuals and families are struggling. With such slow economic progress, our agencies

¹"Connecticut Economy: Good News! We're Not Dead Last," *WNPR News 12*, June, 2014. Available at: <http://wnpr.org/post/connecticut-economy-good-news-were-not-dead-last>

² "Connecticut's 2013 Increase In Personal Income Lower Than National Average," *New Haven Register* 25, March, 2014. Available at: <http://www.nhregister.com/general-news/20140325/connecticuts-2013-increase-in-personal-income-lower-than-national-average>

are preparing for yet another alarmingly bleak outlook for Connecticut's economy for the upcoming year.

Most of you are well aware that many of your constituents struggle with sustained poverty on a daily basis. Recent reports paint a startling picture of Connecticut's most vulnerable population, and indicate that low-income children and families need our agencies' services now more than ever. As was noted in the Connecticut Poverty Report released last year by CAFCA and the UConn Center for Economic Analysis, in 2010 there were more than 720,000 people living at or near poverty in Connecticut. In addition, the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston just issued a report from its New England Community Outlook Survey and found that of the 181,000 families in Connecticut who make less than \$40,000 a year, nearly half reside outside of traditional low-income urban areas. These households, many among the vast wealth of the suburbs, receive marginal social support, have very few local job prospects, and are tied to the expenses of a car to do everything from get groceries to go to work³. Even though poverty is concentrated in Connecticut's urban areas⁴, it is clear that its reach extends to all corners of the state. As these individuals and families fight to get by, the threat of falling into poverty is all too real—possibly just one paycheck away. And for those on the brink of or in poverty, the stress of handling it all can become too much to bear. According to a new study published in *Science*, the daily pressures and stresses of poverty take up so much mental energy that cognitive function is reduced—so much so that it can cause low-income people to suffer a drop in IQ of 13 points, on average⁵.

With such glaring, troubling facts, it comes as no surprise that Connecticut's community action network has consistently seen an increase in request for assistance year after year. In 2013, more than 365,000 people benefited from CAA services statewide. Over 141,000 households avoided crisis with energy assistance, and more than 6,100 people obtained and/or maintained safe and affordable housing. Emergency rental/mortgage payments were made to prevent homelessness for more than 3,100 individuals, and over 16,800 seniors maintained independent living through support services including home meal delivery, home health or homemaker services. These are just a few examples of the type of information you will see throughout our Results Based Accountability (RBA) report (attached). These numbers truly demonstrate the deep impact CAAs have on low-income residents trying to make ends meet throughout Connecticut.

It is important to note that our network's success in providing antipoverty programs and services to low-income residents is paralleled by its reporting transparency and accountability. The National Association for State Community Service Programs (NASCSPP) requires Community Action Agencies in all states to employ an RBA framework called Results-Oriented Management and Accountability, or ROMA. By using ROMA, we are able to efficiently and effectively measure customer, agency and

³ "Connecticut's Suburban Poor 'Lost In The Shadows,' Report Says," *Hartford Courant*, 13, August, 2014. Available at: http://articles.courant.com/2014-08-13/business/hc-poverty-suburbs-new-england-20140813_1_poverty-boston-fed-families

⁴ *Financial Inequality in Connecticut: Looking at What the Numbers Really Say*. CT Voices for Children, November 2013. Available at: <http://www.ctvoices.org/sites/default/files/files/CTFinInequality110713.pdf>

⁵ "Poverty Impedes Cognitive Function," *Science*, 30 August, 2014. Available at: <http://www.sciencemag.org/content/341/6149/976>

community outcomes for the purposes of reporting to stakeholders and pursuing continuous improvement in our administration, coordination, and service delivery. As you can see from the attached RBA report, we have cross-walked ROMA performance metrics with the legislature's preferred RBA reporting framework so that it is more readily accessible for you to understand in your format.

Additionally our agencies 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 then analyzes each agency and develops an action plan for continuous improvement based on relevant best practices.

All of the issues discussed here today point to one thing: Connecticut's slow economic recovery progress continues to make things worse for our state's most vulnerable residents. Our communities need us, and they need us now. Throughout the course of history, our CAAs have remained steadfast in providing vital programs and services such as energy assistance, early child care and education, financial literacy, and much more to help individuals and families get back on their feet when they face financial hardship. As 2014 marks the 50th Anniversary of Community Action and President Lyndon B. Johnson's declaration of War on Poverty in America, we have never been more committed to continue to fight this war and to do all within our power to empower people in need and help them face the challenges of today, tomorrow, and the next fifty years.

I would like to thank Commissioner Bremby and our State CSBG Administrators, as well as the General Assembly—especially the committees represented here today—for understanding the importance of supporting the important work our state's Community Action Agencies do on a daily basis for Connecticut's families. As a network we are deeply committed to empowering people and building communities, and these efforts have never been more necessary than they are now.

Again, thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to take any questions you may have.

(Enclosure: RBA report)

Community Action Community Services Block Grant

Results That Matter





Community Services Block Grant

- 1981: Creation of the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) changed the regulatory and funding basis of Community Action Agencies.
- Community action became a funding stream administered by states.
- CSBG serves as core funding for Community Action Agencies and provides underlying support for all CAA functions.



CT COMMUNITY ACTION: AGGREGATE RESULTS THAT MATTER

How much did we do?

- At least 365,827 people statewide benefited from CAA services last year.
- 50,000 barriers to initial or continuous employment were reduced or eliminated.

How well did we do it?

- Volunteers donated **over 461,018 hours** to the state's CAAs to help reduce poverty.
- Over **\$11.7 million was returned** to our state's economy with volunteer tax preparation assistance in 2013.
- CAAs engaged over 1,300 low-income people to participate in formal community organizations, government, boards or councils that provide input to decision making and policy setting.

Is anyone better off?

- More than 7,300 people went to work.
- Over 5,600 pre-school aged children are better prepared to start school.
- Over 1,500 youth did better in school – socially, emotionally, athletically and academically.
- Over 6,100 people live in safe and affordable housing.
- Over 39,400 people received needed food from our food pantries.
- Over 37,500 senior citizens maintain an active, independent life style.



EMPLOYMENT & TRAINING

How much did we do?

- **50,000 barriers to employment** were reduced or eliminated.
- 7,346 people obtained employment or self-employment.
- **15,000 people learned skills and competencies** required for employment.
- 676 youth obtained job skills.

How well did we do it?

- Over 5,200 people increased their earned income and/or benefits from the previous year.

Is anyone better off?

- Over 7,300 adults moved closer to self-sufficiency by going to work.
- Children emerging from poverty will likely earn, on average, 39% more than the median income.¹

¹ The Cost of Doing Nothing: The Economic Impact of Recession-Induced Child Poverty" First Focus. December, 2008



FINANCIAL LITERACY & ASSET DEVELOPMENT

How much did we do?

- 304 people opened savings accounts and **accumulated \$46,758 in savings.**
- 11 people purchased homes, 14 people funded education and 4 capitalized small businesses and 10 purchased other assets such as vehicles through IDA Programs.
- Over 6,900 tax returns were filed free of charge.
- Over 2,400 people learned how to better manage their income.
- 2,477 people operated within an established budget for at least 90 days.

How well did we do it?

- For every dollar of funding invested in 2013 Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Programs, **\$92 was returned to the community.**
- Volunteers donated over 10,400 hours saving over \$1 million in tax preparation fees.

Is anyone better off?

- Families with assets are better able to weather economic storms.
- **In 2013 over \$11.7 million was returned to our state's economy with volunteer tax preparation assistance.**
- Nationwide, nearly 85% of IDA savers, purchasing homes with conventional fixed rate mortgages, fared well during the subprime mortgage crisis due to financial education & homeownership counseling. ²



EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

How much did we do?

- Over 5,600 children participated in preschool activities that develop school readiness skills.
- 8,900 children obtained immunizations, medical and dental care.

How well did we do it?

- 8,956 children participated in preschool activities and demonstrated improvement in school readiness skills.
- *In 2013, research noted that **every dollar invested in early childhood programs returns 7%-10%, per child, per year, for the life of the child through productivity and costs.***³

Is anyone better off?

- Over 5,600 children are better prepared to start and succeed in school.
- Almost 9,000 are healthier because they received medical and/or dental care.
- Children in well-functioning homes are less likely to get into trouble in school, get involved with crime, have difficulty learning, or need other supportive services, all of which cost taxpayers.
- These programs lead to:
 - increased worker productivity
 - increased wages for parents
 - lower long term costs for law enforcement, welfare, health care and special education, etc.

³ <http://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/education/279397-to-grow-the-economy-invest-in-early-childhood-education>.



HOUSING & SHELTER

How much did we do?

- Over **6,100 people obtained/or maintained safe and affordable housing.**
- More than 2,300 people received emergency shelter.
- Emergency rental/mortgage payments prevented 3,163 individuals from becoming homeless.
- **Nearly 5,700 households improved home safety through lead removal and other services.**

How well did we do it?

- Over 3,100 households avoided eviction through mediation.
- Over 5,600 housing units in the community were preserved or improved through weatherization or rehabilitation achieved by Community Action activity or advocacy.

Is anyone better off?

- Families who live in safer, more stable housing can better manage their daily lives and their children's nutrition, health, developmental and academic performance.



ENERGY ASSISTANCE & WEATHERIZATION

How much did we do?

- Over 141,600 households avoided crises with energy assistance.
- Over 5,600 homes were weatherized, decreasing energy cost and use.
- Over 37,300 people demonstrated increased knowledge of energy conservation.

How well did we do it?

- For every dollar invested, \$2.97 was saved over the lifetime of the measure.⁴

Is anyone better off?

- Low-income people avoided utility crises, resolved vendor disputes, improved environmental safety and learned how to save money through energy conservation measures.

⁴ Energy Efficiency, Investing in CT's Future, CT Energy Conservation Management Board Report to the Legislature, March 2007.



SENIOR SUPPORT SERVICES

How much did we do?

- Over **37,500 seniors remained active in their communities by participating in community programs.**
- Over 16,800 seniors maintained independent living through support services including home meal delivery, home health or homemaker services.
- 4,787 seniors citizens avoided institutionalization through support services.

How well did we do it?

- Over **4,700 senior citizens avoided institutionalization, saving about \$598 million in nursing home costs in 2013.**⁵

Is anyone better off?

- Over 37,500 senior citizens maintain an active, independent life-style.

⁵ Based on the National average per diem nursing home rate of \$249, per The MetLife Market Survey of Nursing Home, Assisted Living, Adult Day Services and Home Care Costs, 2012 survey, www.metlife.com



YOUTH DEVELOPMENT & AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMS

How much did we do?

- 676 youth obtained job skills.
- 1,140 youth improved social/emotional development.
- 463 youth avoided at-risk behavior for at least 3 months.
- 396 youth reduced involvement with the criminal justice system.
- Over 1,500 youth increased their academic, athletic or social skills through participating in after-school programs.
- 485 fathers participated in classes and activities to strengthen their parenting skills.

How well did we do it?

- ***For every dollar invested in early childhood and youth development, an average of \$16 in benefits is returned to the economy.***
- 933 children at-risk of DCF placement remained with family because of improved family functioning.

Is anyone better off?

- Kids gained a stronger foundation for an economic self-sufficient life.
- Kids did better in school – socially, emotionally, athletically and academically.
- Families stayed together and functioned better.



NUTRITION SERVICES

How much did we do?

- Over **87,200 people received emergency or supplemental food from our food pantries.**
- Over 12,000 seniors participated in congregate meal programs or receive home-delivered meals.
- Over 9,100 children and youth benefited from congregate meals.
- 10,714 people received emergency vouchers for food, formula and/or diapers.

How well did we do it?

- An investment of \$10 per person per year in proven community-based programs to increase physical activity, improved nutrition and prevent smoking and other tobacco use could save the country more than \$16 billion annually within 5 years. **CT's ROI is 6.6 to every dollar spent.⁷**

Is anyone better off?

- People of all ages stayed healthier by eating more nutritious meals.
- Pregnant women had healthier pregnancies and healthier babies.

7 Phisic Ventures, LLC, Trust for America's Health: "Investment in Disease Prevention Could Save America More Than \$16 Billion in Five Years" July 17, 2008



HEALTH & COUNSELING SERVICES

How much did we do?

- Over 6,700 people obtained access to needed health care.
- Over 2,900 youth improved physical health and development.
- 463 youth learned how to avoid at-risk behavior.
- Over 396 youth reduced involvement with the criminal justice system.

How well did we do it?

- 2,613 participants improved their family functioning and/or behavior because of counseling.
- 4,434 parents/caregivers improved family functioning as a result of classes or supportive services.

Is anyone better off?

- Thousands of low-income people state-wide lived healthier lives because of the access to health care that they received.
- Children in well-functioning homes are less likely to get into trouble in school, get involved in crime, have difficulty or need other supportive services. Our programs help strengthen families, keep communities safe and save tax payers money.



CT CAAs LEVERAGE RESULTS THAT MATTER

How much did we do?

- CT CAAs brought **over \$167 million** of federal funding into CT to fight the causes and effects of poverty in 2013.
- In 2013, our network reported 1,733 partnerships:
 - 1,260 partnerships to improve and coordinate service.
 - 844 partnerships to improve community planning.
 - 441 partnerships to achieve improved outcomes.
- Over 461,000 volunteer hours were donated to CT CAA's in 2013.

How well did we do it?

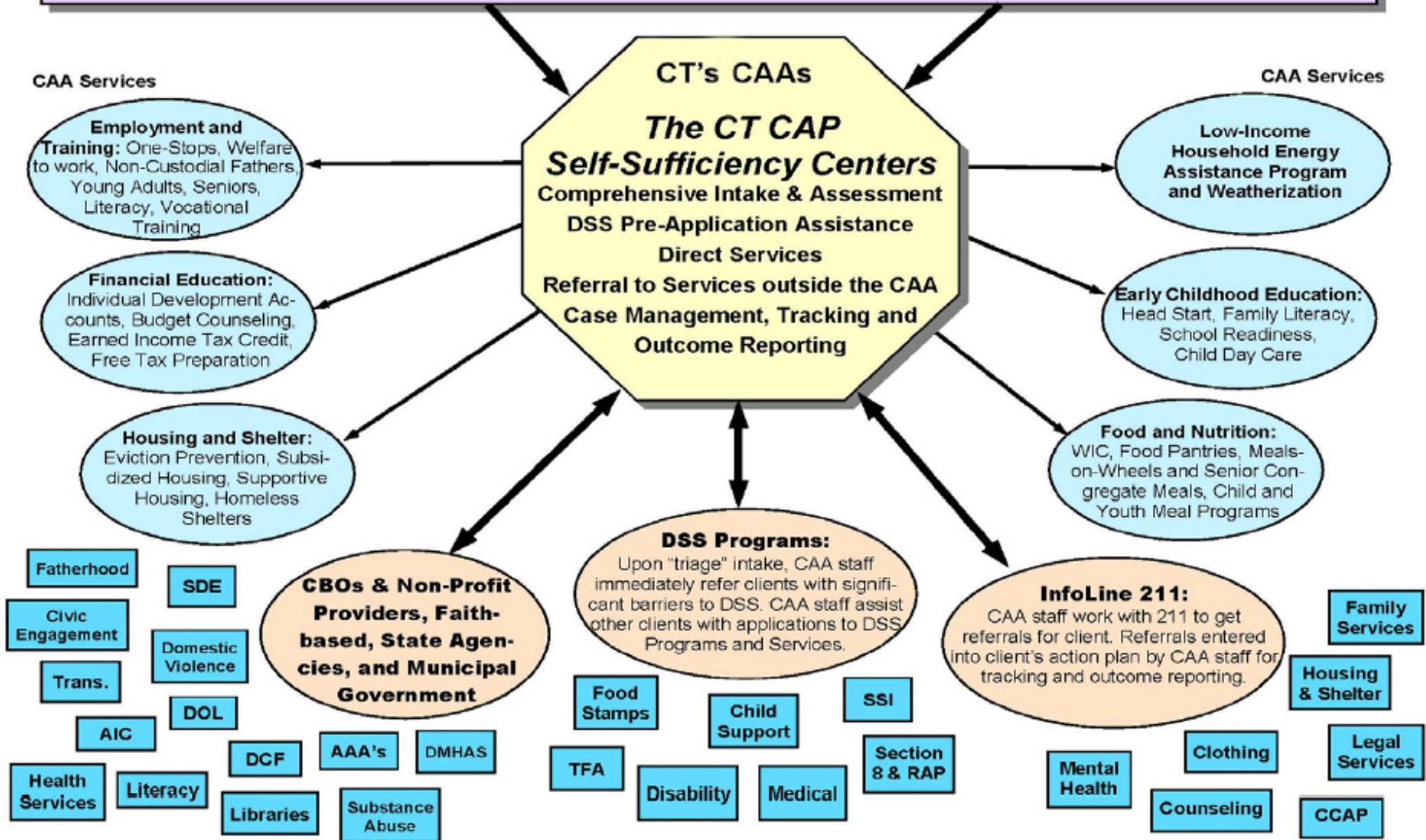
- CT CAAs leverage funding sources & community volunteers to fight poverty efficiently.
- ***For every \$1 of CSBG, the CT CAA Network leveraged \$10.27 from state, local, and private resources, including the value of volunteer hours.***
- Using HSI funds, CAA's form a statewide network to provide a one-stop center of service delivery. Low income residents connect to the network efficiently and easily.
- CAA organizations are lean and efficient because of leveraged funding, partnerships that share resources, dedicated staff, and community volunteers.

Is anyone better off?

- Over 365,000 low-income CT residents from 146,021 families are working towards improved self-sufficiency.
- All CT residents benefit from taxpayer dollars that are efficiently and well spent.

Connecticut Human Services Infrastructure

Low-Income Individuals and Families Walk-ins and Referrals from DSS, InfoLine 211, and others



Connecticut's Community Action Agencies

- Action for Bridgeport Community Development, Inc. (ABCD) www.abcd.org
- Access Community Action Agency (Access) www.accessagency.org
- Bristol Community Organization, Inc. (BCO) www.bcact.org
- Community Action Agency of New Haven, Inc. (CAANH) www.caanh.net
- Community Action Agency of Western Connecticut, Inc. (CAAWC) www.cacd.org
- Community Renewal Team, Inc. (CRT) www.crtct.org
- Human Resources Agency of New Britain, Inc. (HRA) www.hranbct.org
- New Opportunities, Inc. (NOI) www.newoppinc.org
- TEAM, Inc. (TEAM) www.teaminc.org
- Thames Valley Council for Community Action, Inc. (TVCCA) www.tvcca.org