

TESTIMONY of Laura Mutrie, LCSW

February 25, 2015

RE: Governor's Budget Bill (HB 6824)

APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

Distinguished Chairpersons, Vice-Chairpersons, Ranking Members, and Members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Laura Mutrie, I am a member of the TEAM Inc, Board of Directors and a very concerned citizen of Milford, a city served by TEAM. TEAM, Inc. is a Community Action Program serving the Lower Naugatuck Valley and Milford communities. **I am writing in strong opposition to the elimination of the Human Services Infrastructure (HSI) Community Action Program line from the Department of Social Services biennium State budget ending June 30th 2017.**

As a social worker serving the Lower Naugatuck Valley for more than a decade, I became familiar with the folks who will be the most impacted by this devastating proposed cut; these are the people in our state who can least afford to lose the kind of compassionate care and services provided by the Community Action Programs at TEAM, Inc. As you know, Connecticut's Community Action Program Network provides individuals and families with access to comprehensive social services they need to gain or maintain self-sufficiency – this service model includes linkages to DSS and other agencies in the communities to improve coordination, avoid duplication, and enhance the delivery of services to alleviate the causes and improve the effects of poverty. Connecticut is home to some of the most privileged people in our country, and it is in this state that we also experience an ever-widening gap between those people and the people who struggle everyday to overcome the negative effects of poverty and other sources of insecurity and vulnerability. Their worlds have little in common even now – how much more disparity will this HSI cut impose?

Right here in TEAM's communities, HSI funding allows low-income and vulnerable populations to avoid crisis and achieve stability via basic-need services and comprehensive case management. These activities include home-heating energy assistance and counseling to reduce and cover their energy costs – it includes housing and residential services designed to assist individuals in locating, obtaining, and retaining suitable housing – it includes income management services that encompasses household financial counseling, tax counseling/filing, asset-building, and personal credit – it includes support and empowerment to ensure seniors remain independent – it includes assistance to individuals in acquiring the skills that promote opportunities for employment and in securing employment – it includes the provision of addressing food- and diaper-need. I have personally referred clients to TEAM for these services and witnessed the positive difference these services have made in the lives of individuals and families. This work is all done with a faith in the human spirit and the power of people given the opportunity to take control of their lives using the tools and education TEAM provides. In addition to these direct services, TEAM's linkages and referrals to local and State services compliments our multigenerational integrated service delivery system called the Human Services Infrastructure (HSI). **HSI is the safety net** in TEAM's communities – and it is the safety net in all 169 cities and towns supported by Connecticut's Community Action Program Network and HSI funding.

Eliminating **\$3.4 million** of HSI funds will actually mean a **direct cut of almost \$5 million** in services to low-income families since these funds are used as a match for federal funds. Additionally, last year **for every dollar of HSI funds, almost \$100 dollars was leveraged** for programs to help Connecticut families and communities. **Surely that's an investment worth keeping.**

Although it has been over six years since the economic recession hit, Connecticut's Community Action Program Network continues to see an increase in the demand for services in communities across the state. Of the **365,000** customers we served last year, **69,000 were in the 55 + age** range with an additional **5,540 more seniors than in 2013**. Of the **29,200 who have a 2 to 4 year college degree an additional 3,300 customers** came to us last year with those credentials. These statistics go to show that we are seeing people who have never asked for assistance before and who are still feeling the impact of the Great Recession. As a matter of fact, we are continuing to lose our middle class and more individuals and families are struggling every day just to survive. This issue is needs to be grappled with by all those who care about our state and the opportunities it provides for generations to come. If we do not invest in helping the most vulnerable citizens to become self-sufficient and this trend continues what will the outcome be for the children who are growing up here today.

It is important to note that our network's success in providing antipoverty programs and services to low-income residents is paralleled by our reporting transparency and accountability. We 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 community outcomes for the purposes of reporting to stakeholders and pursuing continuous improvement in our administration, coordination, and service delivery. Our agencies also undergo vigorous state monitoring and undertake the Quality Community Action Assessment developed and administered by the Northeast Institute for Quality Community Action (NIQCA) to ensure accountability evidenced by TEAM's effective and efficient service delivery outcomes.

In summary, I would like to personally thank you for understanding the importance of supporting the work of TEAM and the Community Action Program Network. As an agency of the CAP Network, TEAM is deeply committed to empowering people and building communities, and these efforts have never been more necessary than now. **HSI is the safety net for our most disadvantaged populations, please restore the HSI CAP funding.**

Laura Mutrie, LCSW
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