

TESTIMONY of Stephane Skibo
February 26, 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 Stephane Skibo and I am the Chairwoman of the Board of Directors of TEAM Inc, a Community Action Program serving the Lower Naugatuck Valley and the Orange, Woodbridge 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.**

In light of the devastating reality of poverty within this the richest state in the country with the largest income inequality gap, the unthinkable – this proposed elimination of HSI funding – may fall upon our most vulnerable individuals, families, and seniors throughout Connecticut's communities. 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.

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. 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. Even in my relatively wealthy community of Orange, TEAM's services are necessary to my most fragile neighbors.

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.

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.**

Again, thank you for your time and consideration. I volunteer my time to TEAM Inc. because of the great work it accomplishes. Please do not reduce our ability to help those most vulnerable in their time of greatest need.

Stephane M. Skibo
520 Ridge Road
Orange, CT 06477
(203) 799-8046