



February 27, 2015 Public Hearing Testimony before the Connecticut General Assembly Appropriations Committee

Governor's Budget Bill

Distinguished Chairpersons, Vice-Chairpersons, Ranking Members, and Members, my name is Amos Smith and I serve as President/CEO of the Community Action Agency of New Haven (CAANH) and as the Vice Chair of the Connecticut Association for Community Action (CAFCA). **I am here to express our concern over the Administration's recommendation to eliminate the \$3.4 million Human Service Infrastructure – Community Action Program (HSI) line item from the Department of Social Services budget.**

CAFCA is the state association for Connecticut's ten (10) Community Action Agencies (CAAs). These are the local agencies designated by federal and state governments as partners to help people manage when they're struggling to make ends meet, and to help them find pathways out of poverty.

Our network serves all 169 cities and towns and more than 365,000 people annually in each and every part of the state. We utilize a Results Based Accountability (RBA) framework to track, analyze and report our outcomes. We collaborate across silos with state government and other nonprofit providers and businesses to help families avoid prolonged crisis. We empower people with information, consistent support, job training, energy assistance, child care, energy conservation services and other vital supports to help them regain their footing. In many instances we serve as a single point of response and triage for families. We administer a variety of programs to reach families as an early intervention strategy. We provide support, assistance and renewal for families when other sources of support have ended.

The HSI–Community Action Program funding is critical to maintaining this effective and efficient system, and it is the bedrock of support that provides the front line worker with the ability to be there to help those most in need. Among so many other accomplishments, HSI allows parents to work, unemployed persons to receive job training, seniors to remain independent, and low-income families to cut and cover their energy costs. With the HSI, our *proven* programs give families a fighting chance.

But we cannot continue to provide such services without the core funding of the HSI CAP funds. I'd like to share with you a few examples of the impact of such a cut to our agency, CAANH – just one of Connecticut's Community Action Agencies:

- We will have to cut 6 full time-temporary positions that are used to support LIHEAP and program operations e.g., home visitation and sign-up of disabled seniors that are without family support to sign them up for LIHEAP, which numbers about 400 each season.
- We will lose our ability to provide mobile outreach, education and enrollment to low income workers in small businesses who lose pay when they miss work to apply for our services. We support the efforts of public housing developments to provide comprehensive support for people with transportation challenges.

- We will lose the capacity to provide comprehensive assessments and referrals that enables clients to receive the range of support needed to improve and speed up their transition towards self sufficiency.
- We will lose 1 part-time Planning Position.
- Outreach and recruitment for support of the Mature Adult Program will be lost. This program improves senior mobility and minimizes social isolation.
- We will lose capacity to staff our Food Pantry & Diaper Bank.
- We lose our ability to provide case management support.

These are just a few of the ways in which our agency will be negatively impacted.

Since the Great Recession began in 2008, demand for our agencies' anti-poverty programs has skyrocketed. Many of those now coming through our doors have never had to ask for assistance before. These are people who have played by the rules - received an education, respect authority, worked hard, and raised their children to be industrious. Yet, whatever economic gains have been made over the past couple of years since the Great Recession supposedly ended, these folks have not been part of that recovery. They may initially come through our doors for energy assistance, but, of course, in addition to energy assistance, these families have multiple other needs as well. It is the HSI line item that makes it possible for CAAs to help individuals and families face these challenging times of crisis and allow us to offer them a hand up. These, your constituents in every community in Connecticut, are the very people we serve with the resources provided by HSI.

While we are constantly being asked to do more with less and are accustomed to cuts such as those through sequestration and rescission, many of us are also governed by strict federal and state standards of accountability. In keeping with our tradition of measuring and articulating performance and accountability requirements, we are providing all members with a copy of our 2014 Annual Report "*Community Action: Making a Difference: Partnerships that work, Results that matter*". We want to stress again, that the **CAAs are one of the only service provider networks in the state that utilizes a RBA system such as the one the legislature has endorsed for many state agencies and service providers for the past several years.**

All of the outcomes reported in our annual report have been accomplished despite the significant challenges thrust upon CAAs by years of funding cuts. HSI has been a significant contributor to us being able to achieve these results. The funding has served as a catalyst to provide key services and attract other support. However, **Connecticut's financial support of our CAAs has decreased dramatically from over \$8 million in the 90's to today's \$3.4, even as we are asked to do more to help families rejoin the economy.**

So while we struggle to help families face their challenges, we ask you to help us meet ours by continuing to provide the funding support we need to serve your constituents. **You can do this most clearly by maintaining the line item in the budget for the Human Services Infrastructure – Community Action Program.**

Thank you for your time and consideration. And thank you for understanding that Community Action Agencies, as jobs engines and employers in partnership with the State, are a vital part of Connecticut's revival. We look forward to working with you and the Administration to even more effectively support Connecticut's revival in the years ahead, especially for our most vulnerable residents.