



February 11, 2016 Public Hearing Testimony before the Connecticut General Assembly Appropriations Committee

Governor's Proposed Mid-Term Budget Adjustments

Distinguished Chairpersons, Vice-Chairpersons, Ranking Members, and Members, my name is Michelle James and I serve as Executive Director of the Community Action Agency of Western Connecticut (CAAWC) and as Vice Chair of the Connecticut Association of Community Action (CAFCA), the state association for Connecticut's ten Community Action Agencies, or CAAs. **I am here to express our opposition to the Administration's mid-term budget adjustment recommendation to 1) eliminate the \$3.1 million Human Services Infrastructure (HSI)–Community Action Program (CAP) line item from the Department of Social Services (DSS) budget; and, 2) move HSI-CAP funding into a new combined DSS line item block grant called Agency Operations.**

Connecticut's Community Action Network—the federal and state designated antipoverty network—provides basic services such as food, shelter, heating assistance, and childcare to low and moderate income individuals, children, and families in every community in Connecticut. We provide these services by utilizing a proven, multigenerational, customer-focused, integrated service delivery system called the Human Services Infrastructure, or HSI. This comprehensive case management approach connects every customer that comes through our doors to the tools, resources, programs, and services they need to move towards short and long-term economic security.

And, as you know, we have worked with you and with state agencies for over thirty years when you first made a budgetary commitment to support antipoverty agencies as a partner in providing these basic services to customers with limited incomes, and to those who are most vulnerable to the causes and conditions of poverty. This partnership has worked well in creating a statewide system of serving our neediest residents, and we are trusted in our communities as the place where people in need will go to for assistance. However, we cannot continue this partnership without a continued funding commitment from you. The Governor's plan will essentially destroy this critical system for front line basic social services delivery.

Our Community Action Agencies also efficiently and effectively track, analyze, and report meaningful customer, agency, and community outcomes and results through a Results Based Accountability (RBA) framework. We are one of the only service provider networks in the state that uses a RBA system like the one the legislature has endorsed for many years. This rigorous program data analysis supports transparency and continuous improvement, ensuring a positive return on investment for the network and our state. You can read more about the work we do in our 2015 Annual Report, *Confronting Challenges, Creating Opportunities*, provided to you with this testimony.

Connecticut's Community Action Agency Network helps families and the state solve problems, avoid crises, and save money. In 2015, our network served more than 347,000 people—your constituents—across all 169 cities and towns. We helped seniors, single parents, children, families, and people with nowhere else to turn tackle the challenges they faced and remain in a safe and secure environment.

Eliminating HSI-CAP, the “core funding” for Community Action Agencies, will severely hinder our ability to provide these critical basic services. The Agency Operations block grant line item allows DSS the discretion to fund, eliminate or reduce services as the agency sees fit, and does not guarantee funding for HSI and the people we serve.

Additionally, this elimination 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. Last year, for every dollar of HSI funds used, almost \$100 dollars was leveraged for programs to help Connecticut families and communities. Surely that's an investment worth keeping.

Thank you for your time and consideration. And thank you for understanding that Community Action Agencies play a critical role in the lives of struggling families here in Connecticut. We ask that you restore HSI-CAP as a separate line item in the state budget, and look forward to working with you and the Administration to even more effectively support Connecticut's most vulnerable residents in the years to come. I am happy to take any questions you may have.