March 5, 2019 Public Hearing Testimony before the Connecticut General Assembly Appropriations Committee

Governor’s Proposed Budget

Distinguished Chairpersons, Vice-Chairpersons, Ranking Members, and Members, my name is Kelley Hall and I am the Development, Communications, and Grants Manager for the Connecticut Association for Community Action (CAFCA), the state association for Connecticut’s 9 Community Action Agencies, or CAAs, the state and federal designated antipoverty agencies. I am here to express our support for the Governor’s proposed budget, especially the portion of the budget that deals with our line item: Human Services Infrastructure–Community Action Program (HSI-CAP), in the Department of Social Services (DSS) budget. I am also here to request the cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for HSI-CAP.

As the largest statewide health and human services safety net service provider, Connecticut’s Community Action Network provides limited income individuals, children, and families in all 169 cities and towns with essential, basic needs services like food, shelter, heating assistance, housing, and childcare. Through a comprehensive, customer-focused service delivery system approach called the Human Services Infrastructure, or HSI, any person that comes through our doors gets connected to the tools, resources, programs, and services they need to move towards short and long-term economic independence.

HSI-CAP is the “core funding” for Community Action Agencies. It allows us to provide our customers with multigenerational, bundled services like case management, employment, education and training, and information and referral to community, local, state, and federal organizations. Last year, we helped 293,840 of your constituents across the state solve problems, avoid crises, and save money—and develop long-range plans for economic success.

As you may know, the HSI-CAP budgetary commitment was made between the State and our Community Action Agency Network in the early 80's and has been the bedrock for our service stability. This successful partnership was crucial in developing the efficient and effective statewide health and human services delivery system we now use today to serve vulnerable and at-risk Connecticut residents. As a result, CAAs continue to be well-known and trusted in the communities they serve as the place to go when people struggle to pay their bills, put food on the table, or find a job.

One of the key elements of our Community Action Network’s continued success in serving limited income residents is the outstanding staff at each CAA. Day after day, they are there on the front lines helping families through extremely difficult financial times. They truly are the backbone of our agencies, and since the HSI budget line has significantly decreased over the past decade, applying the COLA to HSI-CAP will help CAAs in their ability to retain and support their staff if the state minimum wage increases. Our expenses have increased dramatically while funding has decreased, so the COLA for our employees is essential.
Through the provision of case management services, the CAA Network also administers the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and manages both the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG), Case Management program and the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) Outreach program. Additionally, by June 2019, we’ll have 114 Community Health Workers (CHWs) trained to better address Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) with a goal of promoting health outcomes and reducing health care costs. We can also continue to save the State time, money, and help avoid duplicative administrative efforts by running similar programs for limited income residents across state agencies and/or as the Administrative Services Organization (ASO) for federal block grants and other state funding streams that require direct service provision and coordinated case management.

Our network’s proven success in providing antipoverty programs and services that work is paralleled by our reporting transparency and accountability. We are one of the only service provider networks in Connecticut to use a Results Based Accountability (RBA) framework like the one the legislature has endorsed for years. Through RBA, we track, analyze, measure, and report meaningful customer, agency, and community-level change outcomes and results—ensuring a positive return on investment for the network and the state. Our 2018 Annual Report, Impact & Outcomes, highlights the crucial work we did last year to help stabilize communities and families by giving them the tools they need to rejoin the economy. It can be found at www.caica.org.

Finally, HSI-CAP is a smart investment in our human service delivery system because it is used as a state match for federal funds, which essentially doubles its value. Last year, for every dollar of HSI funds used, $83.19 was leveraged for programs to help our state’s families and communities. That’s an additional $221M in local, federal, and private funds for needed programs and services.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and for understanding the vital role Community Action Agencies play in the lives of those facing financial hardship here in Connecticut. We look forward to working with you and the Administration to continue serving our state’s poorest residents.