August 26, 2019 Public Hearing Testimony before the Connecticut General Assembly Appropriations and Human Services Committees

CSBG ALLOCATION PLAN FFY 2020

Distinguished Chairpersons, Vice-Chairpersons, Ranking Members, and Members of the Appropriations and Human Services Committees:

Thank you for holding the hearing on the proposed Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) Allocation Plan for FFY 2020. My name is Deb Polun and I am the new Executive Director of the Connecticut Association for Community Action (CAFCA). CAFCA is the state association that works with Connecticut’s Community Action Agencies (CAAs), the state and federal designated anti-poverty agencies serving over 250,000 limited income people across Connecticut’s 169 cities and towns.

We are pleased to be here to support Commissioner Gifford and the Department of Social Services’ FFY 2020 allocation plan for CSBG. As you know, CSBG provides Connecticut’s CAA network with essential support for various programs and services that address the needs of limited-income people. CSBG helps CAAs provide an effective, customer-focused, multigenerational, integrated service delivery system for the people we serve. This comprehensive ‘no wrong door’ approach means that when someone goes to a Community Action Agency for any reason, they are accepted at any contact point and guided through a service system that works to address both short and long-term needs, helping people to achieve and maintain economic stability. Individuals and families may have needs related to housing, food, child care, employment, and more.

CSBG funds are essential for those struggling to make ends meet, especially in the current economic climate. A new analysis from Pew Charitable Trusts reports Connecticut lagging behind the nation in personal income growth, and the state is still feeling the effects of the first few years after the last recession ended.1 The 2019 “Rich States, Poor States” scorecard on economic performance ranked Connecticut last among the 50 states for the second year in a row2. What’s more, the wealthiest one percent in Connecticut earn an average income of almost 40 times more than the bottom 99 percent.3 We may still be the richest state in the nation—we’re ranked No. 1 in per-capita income—but the people we serve live a much different reality.

For them, every day is a continuous struggle. While all of us juggle work, our personal lives, financial and other obligations, they’re also making endless, agonizing tradeoffs. Being forced to choose between things like paying for food or the electric bill, sending their child

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to day care or paying their rent, comes at a cognitive cost—the equivalent of living each day as if you hadn’t slept the night before. Having this much bandwidth wrapped up in just trying to make it from one day to the next makes it much harder to solve problems, resist impulses, and think long-term.  

This is where Connecticut’s Community Action Agencies come in. Well-known and trusted in the communities they serve, they connected 259,512 customers last year to the tools, resources, programs, and services they needed to survive and thrive. They helped limited income individuals and families meet their immediate, short, and long term needs, identify goals, and worked side by side with them to plan, achieve, and maintain a realistic path to economic self-sufficiency. You can find examples of this information in our Results Based Accountability (RBA) report attached to my testimony. I hope you take a few minutes to review these important results, as they truly show Community Action’s impact on Connecticut’s most at-risk and vulnerable people.

So, how do CSBG funds make all of this happen? CSBG allows CAAs to conduct comprehensive community needs assessments to determine which programs, services, and resources will address the specific, unmet needs of people within the communities they serve. These needs may vary—for example, in rural versus urban areas. CAAs use CSBG funds for strategic planning to design and implement programs that meet those needs, while also considering organizational change, growth, and financial sustainability. CSBG funds also provide training and technical assistance to CAA staff—including tracking the services they provide—to assist with state and federal data reporting requirements. And, CAAs have thousands of partnerships with other local, state, federal, and community-based organizations, working to coordinate and improve service integration.

Notably, these federal CSBG dollars are also critical in leveraging both public and private funds. Each dollar in CSBG funds leverages $28.55 from federal, state, local, and private resources, including the value of volunteer hours.

Again, I would like thank Commissioner Gifford, Deputy Commissioner Brennan, State CSBG Administrators, and the General Assembly - especially the committees represented here today - for continuing to support the critical work Connecticut’s Community Action Agencies do to empower people in need and improve communities across the state. We look forward to working with you as we continue to serve those in need. Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to take any questions you may have.

(Enclosure: RBA report)

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1981: Creation of the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) changed the regulatory and funding basis of Community Action Agencies.

Community action became a funding stream administered by states.

CSBG serves as core funding for Community Action Agencies and provides underlying support for all CAA functions.
CT COMMUNITY ACTION: AGGREGATE RESULTS THAT MATTER

How much did we do?
- 259,512 people statewide benefited from CAA services last year.
- 106,598 households were provided services from CAAs last year.

How well did we do it?
- Volunteers donated over 296,290 hours to the state’s CAAs to help reduce poverty.

Is anyone better off?
- More than 2,500 people went to work.
- 5,629 children participated in formal preschool programs.
- 81,456 households avoided crises with energy assistance.
- 1,021 youth achieved academically and socially, and displayed other school success skills.
- Over 1,700 people obtained safe and affordable housing.
- Over 10,800 people received emergency food assistance.
- Over 15,000 older adults maintained an active, independent lifestyle.

EMPLOYMENT & TRAINING

How much did we do?
- 2,531 people obtained employment or self-employment.
- Over 770 individuals obtained a recognized credential, certificate, or degree relating to educational or vocational skills.
- 421 youth obtained employment to gain skills and/or income.

How well did we do it?
- Over 840 people increased their earned income and/or benefits from the previous year.

Is anyone better off?
- Over 2,500 adults moved closer to self-sufficiency by going to work.
- 240 people completed their GED or post-secondary education in order to maintain their employment and/or increase their earnings from income.
- In 2018, median annual earnings for a high school dropout were $28,756 compared with $37,960 for a high school graduate and $62,296 for a college graduate.1

FINANCIAL LITERACY & ASSET DEVELOPMENT

How much did we do?
- Over 10,900 tax returns were filed free of charge.
- 247 people opened savings accounts/IDAs or other asset building accounts.
- 926 people achieved and maintained the capacity to meet basic needs for 90 days.

How well did we do it?
- Volunteers donated 13,898 hours, saving over $2M in tax preparation fees.

Is anyone better off?
- Families with assets are better able to weather economic storms.
- Families are better able to prepare for the future. Children from limited income families with a savings account in their name are 4.5 times more likely to complete college than a child without one.2

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EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

How much did we do?
- Over 5,100 children participated in preschool activities and demonstrated school readiness skills.
- 2,924 children were screened for developmental delays.

How well did we do it?
- 88% of children enrolled in pre-school activities demonstrated improved emergent literacy skills.
- High-quality early childhood development programs can deliver an annual return of 13% per child on upfront costs through better outcomes in education, health, employment, and social behavior in the decades that follow.3

Is anyone better off?
- Early detection & services for children with developmental delays improves and enhances child development—laying a foundation that will improve the life of a child and offer greater opportunities.4
- Children in well-functioning homes are less likely to get into trouble in school, get involved with crime, have difficulty learning, or need other supportive services, all of which cost taxpayers.4
- These programs lead to increased worker productivity, increased wages for parents, and lower long term costs for law enforcement, welfare, health care, and special education.4

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4 https://www.uchicago.edu/ud5eap/pdfs/20170113/ed5eap_chicago_wellfunctioning_homes.pdf
HOUSING & SHELTER

How much did we do?
- Over 1,700 people obtained safe and affordable housing.
- More than 1,160 people experiencing homelessness obtained safe and temporary shelter.
- More than 4,700 rental, mortgage or deposit payments, including emergency rental or mortgage payments, were made to help people obtain or maintain a home.
- Over 1,700 individuals and families received supportive services to build self-sufficiency and/or independent living skills in Community Action Agency supportive or subsidized housing.

How well did we do it?
- 602 individuals avoided eviction through services like emergency payments, eviction counseling, and landlord/tenant mediation.
- Families were able to stay in their homes that were made safer and more energy efficient due to preservation and improvements achieved by Community Action activity or advocacy.

Is anyone better off?
- Families who live in safer, more stable housing can better manage their daily lives and their children’s nutrition, health, development, and academic performance.

ENERGY ASSISTANCE & WEATHERIZATION

How much did we do?
- 81,456 households avoided crises with energy assistance.
- Over 2,000 homes were made a more stable and healthy home environment, and families decreased energy cost and use through weatherization services.
- Over 32,700 people were provided with energy conservation information.

How well did we do it?
- Every $1 collected results in an additional $5.60 of clean energy investment.\(^5\)
- $26M was saved by residents that directly affects household budgets.\(^5\)

Is anyone better off?
- Limited income people avoided utility crises, resolved vendor disputes, improved environmental safety, and learned how to save money through energy conservation measures.
- Small businesses, oil vendors, gas, propane, electric, and utility companies across the state received nearly $75M in payments, helping to stimulate the economy.

SUPPORT SERVICES FOR OLDER ADULTS

How much did we do?
- More than 1,800 older adults and people with disabilities received in-home Care Sessions including nursing, chores, and personal care services.
- More than 10,780 older adults received the necessary nutritional support through home delivered meals or by attending congregate meal sites.

How well did we do it?
- Over 15,540 older adults maintained independent living through support services including home meal delivery, home health or homemaker services.
- With Connecticut’s median nursing home daily rate of $435 a day, $2.4B was saved through support services and older adults remained in their home or out of institutions.6

Is anyone better off?
- Older adults are better able to maintain independence in their own homes when provided with regular social interaction, proper nutrition and in home assistance.

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YOUTH DEVELOPMENT & AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMS

How much did we do?
- 421 youth obtained job skills.
- Over 1,000 youth improved their academic, social and other school success skills.
- 208 fathers participated in classes and activities to strengthen their parenting skills.

How well did we do it?
- 85 children and youth at-risk of DCF placement remained with family because of improved family functioning.
- 97 youth received supportive services to build self-sufficiency and/or independent living skills.

Is anyone better off?
- Effective early childhood services can improve life outcomes for children facing adversity, produce important benefits for society, and generate positive returns on investments.7
- Kids gained a stronger foundation for economic self-sufficient lives.
- Kids did better in school—socially, emotionally, athletically, and academically.
- Families stayed together and functioned better.

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6 Based on the Connecticut median per diem nursing home rate of $435, per: https://www.seniorhomes.com/average-cost

HEALTH & COUNSELING SERVICES

How much did we do?
- Over 1,500 people received health insurance benefit coordination services, allowing them to access needed health care.
- More than 2,500 parents/caregivers received parenting skills training to strengthen their family functioning.

How well did we do it?
- 1,125 people improved their mental and behavioral health and well-being by accessing services.
- More than 1,800 older adults and people with disabilities received in-home Care Sessions including nursing, chores and personal care services.

Is anyone better off?
- Thousands of limited income people statewide lived healthier lives because of the access to health care they received.
- Children in well-functioning homes are less likely to get into trouble in school, get involved in crime, have difficulty, or need other supportive services. Our programs help strengthen families, keep communities safe and save tax payers money.

NUTRITION SERVICES

How much did we do?
- Over 16,900 people received emergency or supplemental food from our food pantries.
- Almost 10,785 older adults participated in congregate meal or home-delivered meal programs.
- Over 10,300 children and youth benefited from congregate meals.
- Over 8,800 people received emergency vouchers for food, formula and/or diapers.

How well did we do it?
- Over 2,500 children and youth were provided with nutritious snacks and meals through Community Action summer congregate meals.

Is anyone better off?
- Hunger and food insecurity may increase the risk for lower dietary quality and undernutrition. In turn, undernutrition can negatively affect overall health, cognitive development, and school performance.8
- Pregnant women had healthier pregnancies and healthier babies through the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program.

8 Center for Disease Control, August 2015, Nutrition and the Health of Young People available from: http://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/nutrition/facts.htm
How much did we do?
- In 2018, CT CAAs brought over $144 million of federal funding into CT to fight the causes and effects of poverty.
- In 2018, our network reported 2,145 partnerships to improve and coordinate services, improve community planning, and achieve improved outcomes.
- Over 296,290 volunteer hours were donated to CT CAAs in 2018.

How well did we do it?
- CT CAAs leverage funding sources & community volunteers to fight poverty efficiently.
- For every $1 of CSBG, the CT CAA Network leveraged $28.55 from federal, state, local, and private resources, including the value of volunteer hours.
- CAAs form a statewide network to provide a customer-focused, integrated service delivery system. This connects limited income residents to the programs and services they need effectively and efficiently.
- CAAs are community based with local boards responding to community needs, including representation from elected officials, local businesses, limited income residents, and other community members.

Is anyone better off?
- 259,512 limited income CT residents from 106,598 families are working towards improved self-sufficiency.
- All CT residents benefit from taxpayer dollars that are efficiently and well-spent.
Connecticut’s Community Action Agencies

- Action for Bridgeport Community Development, Inc. (ABCD)  www.abcd.org
- Access Community Action Agency (Access)  www.accessagency.org
- Community Action Agency of New Haven, Inc. (CAANH)  www.caanh.net
- Community Action Agency of Western Connecticut, Inc. (CAAWC)  www.caawc.org
- Community Renewal Team, Inc. (CRT)  www.crtct.org
- Human Resources Agency of New Britain, Inc. (HRA)  www.hranbct.org
- New Opportunities, Inc. (NOI)  www.newoppinc.org
- TEAM, Inc. (TEAM)  www.teaminc.org
- Thames Valley Council for Community Action, Inc. (TVCCA)  www.tvcca.org

For more information, contact the CT Association for Community Action (CAFCA) at 860.832.9438 or learn more at www.cafca.org.