February 16, 2021 Public Hearing Testimony before the
Connecticut General Assembly’s
Human Services Committee

In support of

House Bill 6416: An Act Concerning the Removal of Liens on the Property
of Public Assistance Beneficiaries.

Distinguished Chairpersons, Vice-Chairpersons, Ranking Members, and Members,
my name is Deb Polun, and I am the Executive Director for the Connecticut
Association for Community Action (CAFCA), the state association that works with
Connecticut’s nine Community Action Agencies (CAAs), the state and federal
designated antipoverty agencies serving nearly 200,000 low- and moderate-income
people in all 169 cities and towns across the state.

I write to express our support for House Bill 6416, An Act Concerning the Removal
of Liens on the Property of Public Assistance Beneficiaries.

CAAs connect their customers to essential programs and services like employment
and training, housing and shelter, energy and heating assistance, early childhood
care and education, asset development, and food and nutrition. Through a holistic,
comprehensive, multigenerational approach, CAAs work with those in need to
plan, achieve, and maintain a realistic path to short and long-term economic self-
sufficiency.

Connecticut’s policy of recovering public assistance by placing liens on the homes
of former welfare recipients is not mandated by federal law, and we are one of the
only states in the country doing it. This outdated, unfair practice disincentivizes
residents who received public assistance in the past from building up their assets,
becoming homeowners, and saving money for retirement lest the state come after
them for reparations. This “poverty tax” perpetuates the cycle of generational
poverty and discourages people who find themselves in a financially vulnerable
situation from seeking support from the State in the first place. What’s more, the
lien remains with the recipient for life – and even gets passed down to their
children.

For nearly 60 years Connecticut’s Community Action Agencies have fought to
address the causes and conditions of poverty, working to remove barriers such as
this one that hinder people from building a better and brighter future for themselves
and their family. Eradicating this dangerous, unjust measure is one step closer in
attaining this goal.

In closing, I urge you to support H.B. 6146. Thank you for raising this important
bill and for your time and consideration.