February 23, 2021 Public Hearing Testimony before the
Connecticut General Assembly’s
Human Services Committee

In support of

House Bill 6471: An Act Establishing a Public-Private Partnership to
Deliver Cost-Effective Human Services and Deter Fraud

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 today to express our support for House Bill 6471: An Act Establishing a
Public-Private Partnership to Deliver Cost-Effective Human Services and Deter
Fraud.

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. Last year, we served nearly 200,000 people statewide.

CAAs have been rooted in their communities for over 55 years, providing locally
driven programs and services that speak to the needs of those they serve. This
includes both as independent agencies and part of a statewide network, partnering
with other community-based organizations and government agencies to ensure the
most efficient and effective provision of services. And, for over forty years,
CAFCA has administered many state and federal grants, led statewide
collaborative efforts, and coordinated multiple subcontractors – including the
successful administration of various statewide service delivery programs. In years
past, this included Residential Energy Assistance Challenge (REACH); Section 8
and the Rental Assistance Program; Safety Net; HUSKY Outreach; Prison Re-
Entry; Lead Abatement; and Individual Development Account (IDA) Programs.
Currently, this includes enrollment in Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) Case
Management; Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Outreach; and
the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), among other
initiatives.

The network’s rich history, years of experience working with neighbors in need
across Connecticut, collaboration with state and federal agencies, and deep
community connections make Community Action Agencies a key partner in
providing essential, cost-effective services to struggling residents. CAAs currently partner with state agencies including the Department of Social Services, Office of Early Childhood, Department of Aging and Disability Services, Department of Housing, and more. As the State plans for its future program administration, and given the potential number of state employee retirements upcoming in the next five years, CAAs stand ready and able to continue and further our partnership. Additional opportunities and initiatives will be cost-effective for the State, while helping to ensure our poorest residents have access to the tools, resources, and support they need to achieve and maintain financial stability.

In closing, I urge you to support H.B. 6471 – and include CAAs as an essential partner. Thank you for raising this important bill and for your time and consideration.