



CAFCA
Connecticut Association
for Community Action

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

Board of Directors

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Action Agency, Inc.

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New Opportunities, Inc.
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TEAM, Inc.

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for Community Action,
Inc. (TVCCA)

In support of

Senate Bill 764: An Act Concerning Medicaid Providers

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 Senate Bill 764, *An Act Concerning Medicaid Providers*, and request that the bill be amended to include Medicaid coverage for Certified Community Health Workers.

Community Health Workers (CHWs) are nonmedical professionals who have been trained to talk with people about health-related issues. They provide culturally-appropriate health education and information, help people get the care they need, and give guidance and counseling to encourage healthy behaviors. They typically are members of the communities they serve and are frontline agents of change. Study after study documents their success in improving health access and health outcomes. That is why the Connecticut General Assembly recognized the importance of CHWs and established a certification program; as of last year, CHWs with specific levels of training and experience are able to be certified in Connecticut by the Department of Public Health.

We know that poverty and poor health outcomes are inextricably linked. People who live below or just above the Federal Poverty Level tend to experience poorer health outcomes because they lack access to resources and supports that promote healthy living and overall well-being. They are usually the most susceptible to material factors such as nutritious food, heating assistance, safe and affordable housing, good education, safe and affordable childcare, and preventative health care.

Connecticut's CAA Network is experienced in addressing the needs of the Medicaid population, and all CAAs have trained CHWs on staff. By partnering with Department of Social Services, as well as other state agencies, CHWs are working to reduce the impact of social determinants of health and to promote improved health outcomes for low-income families, children, and disabled citizens who are served by the state Medicaid program. This has been even more important during the pandemic: six CAAs are serving as Community Resource Coordinators,

and CHWs are a critical piece of keeping people in quarantine home and safe, with their needs met.

CHW services are often covered by grants and time-limited programs (such as the Community Resource Coordinator program). However, with research demonstrating their impact on health, and with a certification program in place, it makes sense to have our state Medicaid program cover their services as well.

With a long history of serving this vulnerable population and a successful track record of providing community-based case management, CAAs know how to support and help people create lifestyle changes and set healthy goals. CAAs and CHWs continue to be committed to working in collaboration with state agencies, health providers, hospitals, behavioral health providers, wellness programs substance abuse providers, and insurance representatives to provide the type of quality case management and coordinated care that is needed to promote healthy outcomes for customers.

In closing, I urge you to support S.B. 764 with an amendment that includes Certified Community Health Workers. Thank you for raising this important bill and for your time and consideration.