



CAFCA
Connecticut Association
for Community Action

**March 2, 2021 - Public Hearing Testimony before the
Connecticut General Assembly's
Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee**

Board of Directors

Peter DeBiasi
Access Community
Action Agency, Inc.

Dr. Monette Ferguson
Alliance for Community
Empowerment, Inc.
(formerly ABCD)

Amos Smith
Community Action
Agency of New Haven,
Inc. (CAANH)

Michelle James
Community Action
Agency of Western CT,
Inc. (CAAWC)

Lena Rodriguez
Community Renewal
Team, Inc. (CRT)

Marlo Greponne
Human Resources Agency
of New Britain, Inc.
(HRA)

Dr. James Gatling
New Opportunities, Inc.
(NOI)

David Morgan
TEAM, Inc.

Deborah Monahan
Thames Valley Council
for Community Action,
Inc. (TVCCA)

In support of

Senate Bill 881: An Act Concerning Workforce Development

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 am here today to express our support for Senate Bill 881: *An Act Concerning Workforce Development*, specifically the sections creating an Office of Workforce Strategy.

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.

Connecticut benefits when every resident has an opportunity to succeed. Yet many vulnerable community members, including people with disabilities and older adults, continue to face barriers to employment – straining the state's workforce development system. Research shows that coupled with a change in the skills employers need and want because of emerging technologies, artificial intelligence, automation, and the gig economy, a "skills gap" has developed – making it challenging for employers to hire appropriately trained people for open positions. Connecticut continues to face a shortage of qualified applicants for middle-skill jobs in fields like advanced manufacturing, construction, and health care, and has struggled to invest state dollars into workforce skills development as it combats budget deficits year after year.

We know workforce development provides linkages that help enable everyone to reach their full potential and contribute to the economy. To truly support and deliver effective workforce services, there must be strong collaboration in and among various stakeholder groups including local, state, and federal government, employers and industry, nonprofit providers, and philanthropy. And, these efforts must be coordinated in a way that is not currently taking place. The Office of Workforce Strategy would provide that capability, and would enhance Connecticut's programming, and therefore opportunities.

Community Action Agencies can – and do – play a key role in workforce development efforts by intervening with person-centered services, providing pathways to resource support, and helping at-risk and vulnerable residents identify and address barriers and issues that impact access to employment. CAAs’ workforce development programs and services are offered to low- and moderate-income people, as shown in the table below. Some of these training programs include basic computer literacy, resume/interview preparation, manufacturing training, allied health training in collaboration with a local hospital, and youth employment. Because of the experience, expertise, and collaboration of CAAs, Dr. Monette Ferguson, Executive Director of Alliance for Community Empowerment, currently serves as Vice Chair of the Equity and Access Committee within the Governor’s Workforce Council.

Connecticut residents are continuing to deal with the adverse effects of the pandemic – including unemployment and possible permanent job changes. Creating an Office of Workforce Strategy is a huge step in the right direction to help get our state’s workforce back on track, and I urge you to support S.B. 881. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Community Action Agency Workforce Development Programs and Services

Program/service	ACCESS	ALLIANCE	CAANH	CAAWC	CRT	HRA	NOI	TEAM	TVCCA
Adult Education		X		X		X	X		
One-Stop Employment									X
Youth and Young Adults	X	X			X	X	X		X
Vocational & Skills Training	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	