



CAFCA
Connecticut Association
for Community Action

**March 3, 2021 Public Hearing Testimony before the
Connecticut General Assembly Appropriations Committee**

**Governor's Proposed FY 2022-2023 Budget
Department of Social Services**

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)

Distinguished Chairpersons, Vice-Chairpersons, Ranking Members, and Members, my name is Deb Polun and I am the Executive Director of 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 all 169 cities and towns across the state.

I am here to talk about the Governor's proposed budget, especially the portion of the budget that deals with our line item: Human Services Infrastructure (HSI) - Community Action Program (CAP) in the Department of Social Services (DSS) budget. I want all of you to know how important the Human Services Infrastructure-Community Action Program funds are to our CAA network.

As the largest statewide safety net service provider, Connecticut's network of Community Action Agencies connects neighbors in need with resources that stabilize and improve lives and communities. These services and resources include, but are not limited to:

- Nutrition (SNAP, Meals on Wheels, Congregate Meals for older adults)
- Housing and shelter
- Asset development and financial literacy
- Energy and heating assistance
- Early childhood care and education

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 and success.

HSI-CAP is the "core funding" for Community Action Agencies, and utilizes a comprehensive, customer-focused, integrated service delivery system approach. This means that anyone can go to a Community Action Agency for any reason and get connected to the programs, services, and resources they need to thrive. Through holistic case management services and information and referral to community, local, state, and federal organizations, we helped nearly 200,000 of your constituents last year across the state solve problems, avoid crises, and save money. HSI-CAP is also used to help support other funding streams and grants that have little or no administrative funds.

Since the State made this budgetary commitment over 30 years ago, our Community Action Network has remained dedicated to partnering with you and state agencies to work on behalf of Connecticut's poorest residents. This successful

partnership was crucial in developing the efficient and effective statewide system CAAs use to serve their customers. As a result, our agencies have a long history of being well-known and trusted in the communities they serve as the place to turn when people are struggling.

This was especially true over the last year. When COVID-19 hit, Community Action Agencies remained open for business and quickly adjusted to ensure the continued provision of services for their customers and those affected by the pandemic. Many were laid off temporarily or permanently and struggled to put food on the table, pay their rent or mortgage, and afford childcare. Some had never needed assistance before and others already having a hard time found themselves pushed further into financial crisis.

As countless people across the state continue to be adversely impacted by COVID-19 and the resulting economic downturn, there are simply not enough resources to help those who exceed state and/or federal program limits but still need assistance with critical, basic needs like groceries, unemployment relief, and eviction and foreclosure prevention. And so, Connecticut's Community Action Agency Network wanted to make you aware that it is proposing that the State establish a flexible client support fund, with \$5 million of state and/or federal funds. The Community Action Agencies would administer this fund to help vulnerable and at-risk populations statewide, particularly those who do not qualify for existing programs and services.

It is important to note that our network's success in providing antipoverty programs and services is also paralleled by our reporting transparency and accountability. We are one of the only service provider networks in Connecticut to use a Results Based Accountability (RBA) framework like the one the legislature has endorsed for years. All Community Action Agencies track, analyze, measure, and report meaningful customer, agency, and community outcomes and results – ensuring a positive return on investment for the network and the state. Our 2020 Annual Report highlights the work we did last year and can be found at www.cafca.org.

Finally, the CAA network would like to request an increase in HSI-CAP funding this year. A smart investment in our human service delivery system, HSI-CAP is used as a state match for federal funds, which essentially doubles its value. Last year, for every \$1 of HSI funds used, our network leveraged \$61.91 for programs to help our state's families and communities. That is an additional \$194 million in local, federal and private funds for needed programs and services.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and for understanding the key role Community Action Agencies play in the lives of those facing financial hardship here in Connecticut. We look forward to working with you and the Administration to continue serving our state's residents.