



CAFCA
Connecticut Association
for Community Action

**March 4, 2021 Public Hearing Testimony before the
Connecticut General Assembly's
Human Services 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

**House Bill 6519: An Act Concerning Data Collection to Prevent
Malnutrition Among Senior Citizens**

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 writing to express our support for House Bill 6519, *An Act Concerning Data Collection to Prevent Malnutrition Among Senior Citizens*.

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.

Food and nutrition programs like Meals on Wheels and congregate meal sites – places like senior centers and churches – play a critical role in the lives of older adults struggling to put food on the table. Feeding America reports that in Connecticut, 8.4% of older adults are food insecure. The situation is even worse for those in metropolitan areas; for example, in Hartford, the rate is 17.4%. In 2019, five Community Action Agencies (CRT, HRA, NOI, TEAM, and TVCCA) helped 14,450 older adults statewide participate in home delivered or congregate meal programs. Research has shown that these essential services help address food security, and contribute to better nutritional status, diet, and overall wellbeing.

These services were even more important during the pandemic, especially when congregate meal sites were forced to shut down. CAAs quickly adjusted the provision of service delivery for their customers across the state, including transitioning the congregate meals program to all home-delivered meals for older adults – allowing them to stay home, safe and healthy, and receive nutritious food.

Historically, some of Connecticut's congregate and home delivered meals programs have been underfunded, leaving CAAs and other providers to fill in the gaps with fundraising and funding from other sources. And now, with the transition to home delivered meals as opposed to congregate settings, costs have increased. We support H.B. 6519, which will develop a system to collect data on things like on the number of food insecure older adults and program costs, as well as provide recommendations to help set these programs and services up for long-term success. Given our aging demographics and the movement to have more people to "age in place" in their communities, we need to ensure that providers can continue to step up to meet the needs of our older adult neighbors.

In closing, I urge you to support H.B. 6519. Thank you for raising this bill and for your time and consideration.