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Comments by Deb Polun, Executive Director
before the Connecticut General Assembly's
Appropriations, Human Services, and Energy & Technology Committees

Public Hearing on
the Low Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP)
Block Grant Allocation Plan for FFY 2022

August 20, 2021

Distinguished Chairpersons, Vice-Chairpersons, Ranking Members, and
Members of the Appropriations, Human Services, and Energy & Technology
Committees:

Thank you for holding this public hearing on the proposed Low Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP) Block Grant Allocation Plan for FFY 2022. The Connecticut Association for Community Action (CAFCA) is the state association that works with Connecticut's Community Action Agencies (CAAs), the state and federal designated anti-poverty agencies serving over 200,000 low-income people in all 169 cities and towns across Connecticut.

As you know, the Community Action Agencies are proud partners with the Department of Social Services (DSS) and with other local agencies in the effort to raise awareness of and enroll people into the CT Energy Assistance Program (CEAP – CT's version of LIHEAP). We look forward to extending this partnership through the administration of the new LIHWAP, to help low-income people across the state maintain access to clean water and wastewater services.

Why LIHWAP?

The Low Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP) was created by Congress as a temporary program to help low-income households and families afford water and wastewater services during the Coronavirus pandemic.

According to the Environmental Policy Innovation Center (EPIC), drinking water and wastewater costs have more than doubled since 2000, far exceeding price increases of electricity, rent, and gasoline. Households with the lowest 20

percent of income pay an average of 10 percent of their monthly income on water bills.

Clean, running water is essential to good health. Congress recognized the importance of this, and the need for assistance, when it created and funded LIHWAP.

Comments on the Current Proposal

CAFCA asks the Committees to support the Department's LIHWAP proposal for FFY 2022. The proposal will provide approximately 20,000 households with assistance paying past and future water and sewer bills. It is designed to mirror CEAP, creating administrative simplicity for customers, CAAs, and DSS – one application will suffice for both programs, and those who have been found eligible for CEAP will be categorically eligible for LIHWAP. Notably, this linked and streamlined design aligns with the recommendations of EPIC's recent study of water assistance programs.¹

CAFCA also appreciates that DSS has proposed that LIHWAP funds be available to be applied to current and future bills, in addition to accrued bills/arrearages. Some customers in financial need may have chosen to pay their water bills in lieu of other bills, so that they could keep this critical resource available; they may now need help with water bills, so they can shift to paying other accrued bills.

CAAs stand ready to provide information about and take applications for this new program.

On behalf of Connecticut's Community Action Network, I would like to thank all of you, as well as Commissioner Gifford and her staff at the Department of Social Services, for your support of and advocacy for this critical program. For your information, I included a list of Community Action Agencies and their phone numbers so you can help your constituents access assistance with their water and sewer bills. (see Table 1 on next page).

¹ Sridhar Vedachalam and Randall Dobkin. 2021. "H₂Affordability: How water bill assistance programs miss the mark." Environmental Policy Innovation Center, Washington D.C.
<http://policyinnovation.org/water/affordability>

Table 1: Community Action Agencies & Phone Numbers for Water & Energy Assistance

Agency	Area Covered	Water & Energy Assistance #
Alliance for Community Empowerment (formerly ABCD)	Greater Bridgeport & Norwalk	(203) 384-6904
<i>Access</i>	Windham County	(860) 450-7400
	Tolland County	(860) 412-1600
CAANH	Greater New Haven	(203) 285-8018
CAAWC	Greater Danbury	(203) 748-5422
	Greater Stamford	(203) 357-0720
CRT	Hartford & Middlesex Counties	(860) 560-5800
HRA	Greater New Britain/Bristol	(860) 356-2000
NOI	Greater Waterbury	(203) 756-8151
	Greater Meriden	(203) 235-0278
TEAM	Lower Naugatuck Valley	(203) 736-5420
TVCCA	Southeastern CT	(860) 425-6681