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Public Hearing Testimony before the
Connecticut General Assembly Appropriations Committee

Governor's Proposed FY '23 Budget Adjustments
Issues Related to Conservation & Development

Deb Polun, Executive Director
Connecticut Association for Community Action, Inc. (CAFCA)

February 15, 2022

Distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

Thank you for holding this public hearing to gather information from the public about the Governor's budget proposals for the upcoming fiscal year. The Connecticut Association for Community Action (CAFCA) is the state association that works with Connecticut's nine Community Action Agencies (CAAs), the state and federally designated anti-poverty 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 of several items in Governor Lamont's budget proposal, related to housing, access to the internet, and workforce development.

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
- Job training
- 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.

I have attached a Profile of Services table to this testimony, which shows the services provided by Community Action Agencies in Connecticut.

Department of Energy & Environmental Protection and Office of Consumer Counsel

CAFCA appreciates the inclusion of funding for broadband infrastructure, both for low-income and multifamily homes and for underserved areas of the state (including rural areas).

The pandemic has intensified the need for reliable, fast internet. As schools, workplaces, religious services, and medical appointments have gone online, some of Connecticut's residents have been left without the necessary connections, due to a lack of available or affordable broadband internet. With funding from the federal Infrastructure Bill, these targeted investments will help Connecticut residents gain access to what has become – and will continue to be – a basic necessity for many.

CAFCA also supports the addition of staff at the Office of Consumer Counsel (OCC) to support activities around broadband expansion and consumer education and outreach. The Community Action Agencies would be pleased to partner with OCC to reach people who will gain from this expansion.

Department of Economic and Community Development

CAFCA supports the expansion of funding through CareerConneCT, to provide new pathways to career training for Connecticut residents. Many of the jobs of today and our future do not necessarily require a college degree. While some training programs exist outside of the academic setting, a lack of coordination and the existence of systemic barriers have made it difficult for Connecticut residents to access those programs.

CareerConneCT will link industry needs with community programs, including input from and implementation of ideas from those who have traditionally had the most difficulty beginning or progressing a career. For example, some of these dollars can be used to provide babysitting, so that single parents can go to night classes/programs. Individuals will also gain access to training on “soft skills,” such as networking, interviewing, and learning workplace norms.

Whether for young people still in high school, or for more experienced workers looking for a change, these pathways and connections will open new doors for brighter futures for historically marginalized populations. CT's Community Action Agencies look forward to participating in these programs, to help our customers reach their highest potential.

Department of Housing

CAFCA supports the proposal to use \$50 million of federal funds to support the creation of 350 affordable housing units for low-income people.

Connecticut has always been an expensive state in which to purchase a home, but the past two years have seen housing prices spiral upwards, putting home ownership out of reach for too many. Similarly, apartments have become more unaffordable, as new units often cater to

“working professionals,” with rents higher than most mortgages. The housing crisis impacts at an individual level – and also poses a danger to Connecticut’s future. If people cannot afford to live here, we will not be able to staff our most important jobs and grow Connecticut’s economy. While Connecticut has made a commitment to and has seen results in reducing homelessness, the next step must be the creation and support of new permanent housing units across our state for people earning a living wage or below.

Additionally, CAFCA supports the targeting of funding towards improving existing housing stock, through lead remediation and abatement and the improvement of other safety/health issues.

Finally, CAFCA asks for the Committee to support an increase in rates paid to nonprofit providers of housing and homelessness services.

Thank you to all of you for your consideration of these important proposals, and, as always, for your service to our state. Please feel free to get in touch with any questions: deb@cafca.org or 860-832-9438.

* Please see attachment

