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Public Hearing Testimony before the
Connecticut General Assembly Appropriations Committee

Governor's Proposed FY '23 Budget Adjustments
Issues Related to the Office of Early Childhood

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

February 17, 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 concern for the lack of investment in early childhood care and education proposed by Governor Lamont.

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.

Office of Early Childhood

Seven of Connecticut's Community Action Agencies provide at least one form of early childhood education for infants through age five, including Head Start, Early Head Start, School Readiness, and other programs. Combined, these agencies served 4,390 children from 10/1/2019-9/30/2021, the most recent reporting period available.

These early childhood programs are not only beneficial for the children enrolled, but they also allow their parents and guardians to go to work, with the comfort that their children will be well cared for.

By investing in a multigenerational approach to early care and learning, Community Action Agencies prepare children for future success, while helping to ensure positive and improved social, emotional, educational, and developmental outcomes, as well as reducing the achievement gap. And, access to high-quality, early childhood care and education programs is essential in helping to break the cycle of poverty.

Unfortunately, despite its importance to our present and future economy, child care has become unaffordable for many. Moreover, the barriers to child care have intensified during the pandemic, including cost and availability. All child care providers have experienced difficulties with fully staffing their classrooms – due to challenges in recruiting and in retaining staff, as well as absences due to COVID (staff themselves or household members). That leads to stressed parents calling out of work and/or scrambling to find coverage on a regular basis.

Through it all, our CAAs have continued to provide care and education, including to the children of essential workers, like health care providers, police, and grocery workers. But, now, we are in a crisis – and we need both federal and state assistance to ensure that we are able to continue to provide high quality care to our next generation of citizens.

Improving access to child care would include:

- Additional funding through the state budget, including Care 4 Kids, to allow child care providers to increase wages and improve benefits for our valued child care providers.
- Additional subsidies for parents, so that they can afford to go to work. For too many people, the cost of child care eclipses the amount they can earn while working.
- Assistance with getting new employees background checks and fingerprinting.

Thank 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

