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Public Hearing Testimony before the
Connecticut General Assembly Appropriations Committee

Governor's Proposed FY '23 Budget Adjustments
Issues Related to Human Services

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

February 23, 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 Governor Lamont's budget proposals related to the Department of Social Services, and to raise an issue related to the Department of Aging and Disability Services.

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 Social Services

CAFCA supports the Governor's budget provisions for the Department of Social Services. We also call your attention to companion legislation, House Bill 5040, which contains budget implementer language related to Human Services items, and is currently before the Human Services Committee.

Sections 2 and 3 of HB 5040 provide a fix for a Community Health Worker program the legislature created last year in Public Act 21-2, June Special Session. The new language transfers jurisdiction of the program from the Department of Public Health to the Department of Social Services and, importantly, clarifies language to allow for the full \$6 million appropriated to be allocated to the Community Action Agencies.

We appreciate the Governor's support of this measure, and we ask for your support as well. Although that bill is not before you today, we are bringing it to your attention, and asking that you consider passing legislation early this session that includes that language. The sooner the legislation is passed, the sooner the CAAs can enhance their capacity with Community Health Workers and meet the original intent of the legislation last year.

Department of Aging and Disability Services

Five of Connecticut's Community Action Agencies (CAAs) provide Meals on Wheels services.

CAFCA asks the Committee to increase funding for this program to help providers meet rising prices for food and gas, as well as the increased minimum wage.

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, 14% of older adults were food insecure in 2017-2018, a situation which has surely worsened over the past four years. In 2020, five Community Action Agencies (CRT, HRA, NOI, TEAM, and TVCCA) helped almost 11,000 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 have been 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.

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. We ask for enhanced support of this important program.

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

