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for Community Action

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Public Hearing Testimony before the
Connecticut General Assembly Human Services Committee

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

*In support of HB 5231: An Act Concerning Data Collection
to Prevent Malnutrition among Senior Citizens*

March 1, 2022

Distinguished members of the Human Services Committee:

Thank you for holding this public hearing to gather information from the public about the importance of various social services programs. 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.

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.

House Bill 5231

CAFCA supports this bill, which would study and make recommendations regarding the costs associated with providing home delivered meals through Meals on Wheels.

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

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.

More funding is needed to sustain this program. Over the past few years – and especially the past few months – we have all seen rising costs related to food, paper products, and gasoline, which, together with labor, are the main drivers of Meals on Wheels expenses. And, labor costs have increased dramatically: minimum wage alone is up 28.7% since September, 2019 and will increase again in July. There are also issues around equitable funding, which this study would address.

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 as well as the study proposed in this bill.

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

