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Public Hearing Testimony before the
Connecticut General Assembly Housing Committee

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

In support of SB 168: An Act Establishing a Right to Housing

March 1, 2022

Distinguished members of the Housing Committee:

Thank you for holding this public hearing to gather information from the public about the importance of affordable, accessible housing in Connecticut. 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.

Senate Bill 168

CAFCA supports this bill, which would implement policies to protect and fulfill a right to affordable, safe, and stable housing for every Connecticut resident as well as establish a Right to Housing Committee to review and advise on housing policies.

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 state’s housing crisis has become increasingly more urgent due to COVID-19 and the resulting economic downturn. The eviction moratorium and the UniteCT program helped thousands of residents stay housed during the pandemic, but now that both the moratorium and the federal program have ended, Connecticut faces a wave of evictions that could result in thousands of residents facing homelessness.

While Connecticut has previously made a commitment to and has seen results in reducing homelessness, the next step must be to implement protections that help keep Connecticut residents housed in the wake of COVID-19 and beyond. This includes eviction prevention programs, legal assistance in evictions, financial assistance, support services, problem-solving counseling, and more.

Given their vast experience in implementing programs and services like these statewide, Connecticut’s Community Action Agencies understand the importance of addressing the housing crisis. All nine agencies also work exclusively with low- and moderate-income individuals and families, offering unique insight on the gaps and needs related to permanent housing access for Connecticut’s most vulnerable residents. For these reasons, CAFCA asks that a representative from its Network be included on the Right to Housing Committee once established.

Housing is integral to addressing and reducing intergenerational poverty and increasing economic mobility. Together we must make living in our state affordable so that children and families can thrive, and our economy and workforce can grow.

We ask for your support of S.B. 168 to make this possible.

Thank you to all of you for your consideration of this important proposal, 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

