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Comments by Deb Polun, Executive Director
before the Connecticut General Assembly's
Appropriations, Human Services, and Energy & Technology Committees

Public Hearing on
the Proposed Amendment to the
Low Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP)
Block Grant Allocation Plan for FFY 2023

August 29, 2022

Distinguished Chairpersons, Vice-Chairpersons, Ranking Members, and
Members of the Appropriations, Human Services, and Energy & Technology
Committees:

Thank you for holding this public hearing on the proposed amendment to the
Low Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP) Block Grant
Allocation Plan for FFY 2023. The Connecticut Association for Community
Action (CAFCA) is the state association that works with Connecticut's
Community Action Agencies (CAAs), the state and federal designated anti-
poverty agencies serving over 200,000 low-income people in all 169 cities and
towns across Connecticut.

As you know, the Community Action Agencies are proud partners with the
Department of Social Services (DSS) and with other local agencies in the effort
to raise awareness of and enroll people into the CT Energy Assistance Program
(CEAP – CT's version of LIHEAP). This year, we have also been engaged in the
administration of the new LIHWAP, to help low-income people across the state
maintain access to clean water and wastewater services.

Why LIHWAP?

The Low Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP) was created
by Congress as a temporary program to help low-income households and
families afford water and wastewater services during the Coronavirus pandemic.

According to the Environmental Policy Innovation Center (EPIC), drinking
water and wastewater costs have more than doubled since 2000, far exceeding
price increases of electricity, rent, and gasoline. Households with the lowest 20
percent of income pay an average of 10 percent of their monthly income on
water bills.

Clean, running water is essential to good health. Congress recognized the importance of this, and the need for assistance, when it created and funded LIHWAP.

Comments on the Proposal

CAFCA asks the Committees to support the Department's amendment for FFY 2023. It is designed to mirror CEAP, creating administrative simplicity for customers, CAAs, and DSS: one application will suffice for both programs, and those who have been found eligible for CEAP will be categorically eligible for LIHWAP. Notably, this linked and streamlined design aligns with the recommendations of EPIC's recent study of water assistance programs.¹

Challenges/Assistance Needed

One challenge of the LIHWAP program administration in Connecticut is the numerous water and wastewater companies operating in our state. Despite the efforts by the Department and CAAs to get all water companies enrolled in LIHWAP, some have refused to do so. This means that many Connecticut residents – although eligible for this important program – are not able to access benefits.

We recommend that all water companies enroll in LIHWAP for the coming year, and we are asking for your support in helping to make that happen. DSS has the full list of participating and non-participating water vendors.

On behalf of Connecticut's Community Action Network, I would like to thank all of you, as well as Commissioner Gifford and her team at the Department of Social Services, for your support of and advocacy for this critical program. For your information, I included a list of Community Action Agencies and their phone numbers so you can help your constituents access assistance with their water and sewer bills. (see Table 1 on next page).

¹ Sridhar Vedachalam and Randall Dobkin. 2021. "H₂Affordability: How water bill assistance programs miss the mark." Environmental Policy Innovation Center, Washington D.C.
<http://policyinnovation.org/water/affordability>

Table 1: Community Action Agencies & Phone Numbers for Water & Energy Assistance

Agency	Area Covered	Water & Energy Assistance #
Alliance for Community Empowerment (formerly ABCD)	Greater Bridgeport	(203) 384-6904
	Norwalk	(203) 838-8110
<i>Access</i>	Windham County	(860) 450-7400
	Tolland County	(860) 412-1600
CAANH	Greater New Haven	(203) 285-8018
CAAWC	Greater Danbury	(203) 748-5422
	Greater Stamford	(203) 357-0720
CRT	Hartford & Middlesex Counties	(860) 560-5800
HRA	Greater New Britain/Bristol	(860) 356-2000
NOI	Greater Waterbury	(203) 756-8151
	Greater Meriden	(203) 235-0278
	Greater Torrington	(860) 496-0622
TEAM	Lower Naugatuck Valley	(203) 736-5420
TVCCA	Southeastern CT	(860) 425-6681