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Connecticut Association
for Community Action

Board of Directors

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Comments by Deb Polun, Executive Director
before the Connecticut General Assembly's
Appropriations, Human Services, and Public Health Committees

Public Hearing on the
Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) Allocation Plan for FFY 2023

September 28, 2022

Distinguished Chairpersons, Vice-Chairpersons, Ranking Members, and Members
of the Appropriations, Human Services, and Public Health Committees:

Thank you for holding this public hearing on the FFY 2023 Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) Allocation Plan. The Connecticut Association for Community Action (CAFCA) is the state association that works with Connecticut's nine 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. We are pleased to support the Department of Social Services' (DSS) FFY 2023 SSBG Allocation Plan.

CAAs connect their customers to essential programs and services like employment and training, housing and shelter, energy and heating assistance, early childhood care and education, and food and nutrition. Through a holistic, comprehensive, multigenerational approach, CAAs work with those in need to plan, achieve, and maintain a realistic path to economic self-sufficiency.

For the past seven years, CAFCA has successfully administered the SSBG Case Management (SSBG CM) program in partnership with Community Action Agencies statewide. A map of SSBG CM catchment areas and agency contact information is included as an attachment to this testimony.

SSBG provides a unique kind of case management. This is because CAA case managers work with vulnerable or at risk adult customers on service provision that facilitates self-sufficiency. Customers are able to work with agency staff for as long as they need, which can range from a few weeks to several months, and sometimes more than a year. Individuals and families who receive SSBG CM must meet specific income guidelines (i.e., below 150% of federal poverty level), residency requirements (i.e., must live in Connecticut) and be part of a vulnerable population. This could be someone who needs mental health treatment, has a physical disability, or is housing insecure.

As with other services provided by Community Action Agencies, SSBG case managers utilize a holistic approach and conduct a full assessment of a customer's needs. This includes things like housing, employment, education, health, and more. Then, together, the case manager and customer set goals, such as achieving a GED, or finding and retaining a new job.

Through the provision of these services, from 10/1/2021-6/30/2022, our agencies helped 3,502 eligible individuals and families receive over 14,000 services including applying for benefits and critical, basic needs services; receiving treatment, health, shelter, and transportation services; searching for and applying to jobs; landlord mediation and housing assistance; and learning about money management and budgeting.

It is clear SSBG CM works for Connecticut. Of those served from 10/1-6/30:

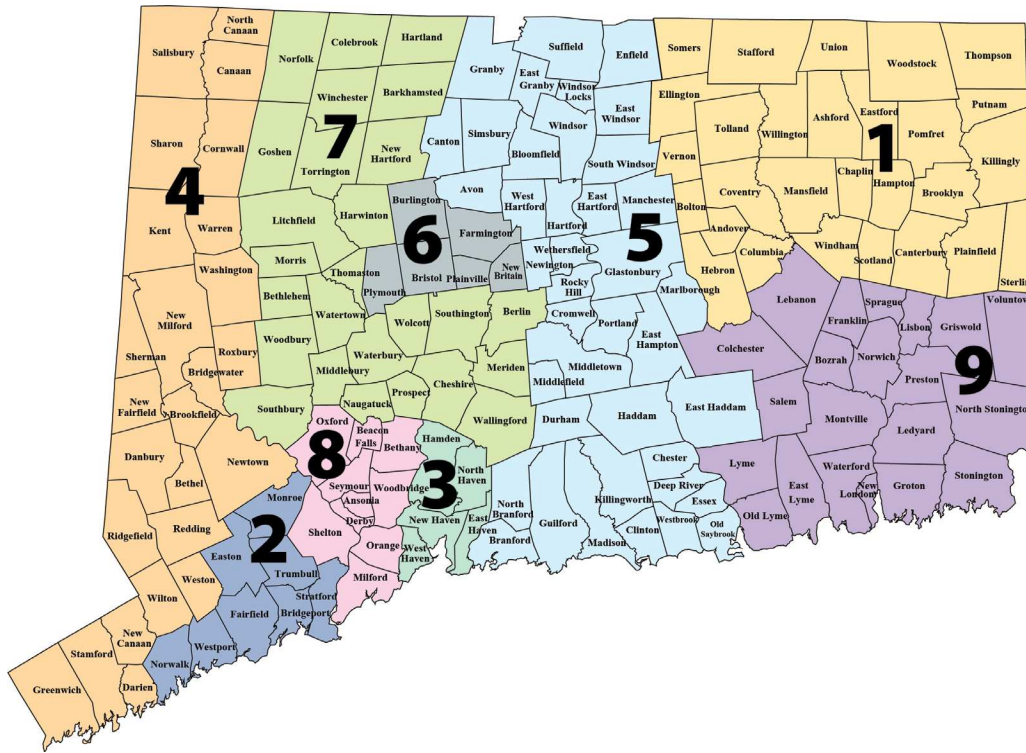
- 67% seeking housing services obtained services that allowed them to prevent or escape homelessness;
- 87% seeking a basic needs service obtained that service;
- 84% seeking public assistance benefits received eligible benefits;
- 78% seeking an improved employment situation have obtained it; and,
- 86% seeking medical treatment received referral and subsequently received appropriate medical care.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Community Action Agencies have transitioned to provide both remote and in-person service delivery and SSBG CM services as appropriate and desired, helping to ensure those facing financial struggles continue to receive assistance. Additionally, vulnerable or at-risk populations affected by COVID-19 are more likely to experience things like unemployment or loss of housing, making SSBG CM even more important during this time.

Again, I would like thank Commissioner Gifford and her team, as well as the General Assembly – especially the committees represented here today – for continuing to support the critical work Connecticut's Community Action Agencies do to empower people in need and improve communities across the state. CAFCA looks forward to continue to efficiently and effectively run this critical program for the State of Connecticut.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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