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Public Hearing Testimony before the  
Connecticut General Assembly's Aging Committee

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

*In Support of HB 5781: An Act Concerning a Study  
of the Needs of Senior Citizens*

February 2, 2023

Distinguished members of the Aging Committee:

Thank you for holding this public hearing to consider proposals that impact Connecticut's older adults and aging population. 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. About 23% of our customers last year were over the age of 60.

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 (inc. SNAP outreach, Meals on Wheels, and Congregate meals)
- 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 5781*

CAFCA supports this bill, which would study the needs of older adults in our state. Specifically, from the Community Action Agency perspective, we support the study of nutrition assistance.

Over the past twenty years, Connecticut policymakers have worked to create more opportunities for people to remain in their communities as they age. Instead of entering nursing homes – where rent, food, and other amenities are included – older adults are choosing to stay in their homes or move to smaller homes or other community-centered facilities. This is a rare scenario where we are able to provide people with more choices and also save the state money. Part of our commitment to promoting these opportunities must be to help those older adults meet their basic needs, like housing, food, and health care.

Nutrition assistance programs, like Meals on Wheels and Congregate Meals, are critical to this mission. Research has shown that these essential services not only provide food security, but also contribute to better health, reduce loneliness, and improve overall wellbeing.

Five of Connecticut's Community Action Agencies (CAAs) provide either Meals on Wheels or congregate meal services (or both). In 2020, these five Community Action Agencies (CRT, HRA, NOI, TEAM, and TVCCA) helped almost 11,000 older adults statewide with meals.

The need for these programs is increasing, due both to our aging population and to our state's efforts to help people age in place. Estimates are that, by 2025, older adults will comprise at least 20% of the population of almost every town in CT.

Separately, the operational costs for these programs are rising, due to increased prices for food and gasoline, and to increased labor costs. Grocery costs increased by about 12% in 2022. And, minimum wage is up 38.6% in the past 3-1/2 years and will increase again in June.

These factors combine to create a crisis point for nutrition assistance programs. A study of these programs is needed, to research:

- ☞ how much funding is needed to meet the current needs of older adults in Connecticut;
- ☞ how that funding is and should be allocated, to ensure equity across areas of the state and providers; and,
- ☞ how to plan for future needs.

Thank you all for your consideration of this important proposal, and for your service to our state. Please feel free to get in touch with any questions: [deb@cafca.org](mailto:deb@cafca.org) or 860-832-9438.

\* Please see attachment

