



CAFCA
Connecticut Association
for Community Action

Board of Directors

Peter DeBiasi
Access Community
Action Agency, Inc.

Dr. Monette Ferguson
Alliance for Community
Empowerment, Inc.
(formerly ABCD)

Amos Smith
Community Action
Agency of New Haven,
Inc. (CAANH)

Michelle James
Community Action
Agency of Western CT,
Inc. (CAAWC)

Lena Rodriguez
Community Renewal
Team, Inc. (CRT)

Dr. Marlo Greponne
Human Resources Agency
of New Britain, Inc.
(HRA)

William Rybczyk
New Opportunities, Inc.
(NOI)

David Morgan
TEAM, Inc.

Deborah Monahan
Thames Valley Council
for Community Action,
Inc. (TVCCA)

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

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

*In support of HB 6554: An Act Appropriating Funds for
Certain Homelessness Response Programs*

February 2, 2023

Distinguished members of the Housing Committee:

Thank you for holding this public hearing to gather information from the public about the need for 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.

House Bill 6554

CAFCA supports this bill, which would appropriate needed funds for programs that help people get and stay housed.

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 much more unaffordable: existing apartments have seen significant, unprecedented rent increases, and new units often cater to “working professionals,” with rents higher than most mortgages.

The state’s housing crisis has become increasingly more urgent over the past few years, due to COVID-19, the resulting economic downturn, and increased prices on other basic needs, such as food and energy. The eviction moratorium and the UniteCT program helped thousands of residents stay housed during the pandemic, but since the moratorium and the federal program ended, Connecticut has seen a tidal wave of evictions, resulting in more housing-insecure residents and burdening the systems that help them.

Connecticut’s Community Action Agencies understand the importance of – and play a critical role in – addressing the housing crisis. Through case management, housing assistance, participation in Coordinated Access Networks, and the use of Community Health Workers to address health-related social needs, our CAA staff are on the ground, helping residents with housing needs every day. All nine agencies 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.

And, with that experience, here is what we know: housing is increasingly expensive per month; landlords often ask for two or three months’ worth of rent up front for a security deposit; landlords have the ability to raise rents and find other tenants who are willing to pay; the costs of every basic need have risen over the past couple of years; and protections from evictions have ended. The restart of the UniteCT program will be helpful, but that program will come to an end as well.

Our clients use phrases like:

- “Every day I wake up and the first thing I think about is money, and I can’t breathe.”
- “It’s like quicksand – the minute you think you’re out of it, you get pulled down.”
- “I’m worried about having my children taken away because I cannot make the rent.”

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.

The systems that help individuals facing eviction and homelessness strive to keep up with increased need, while facing challenges recruiting and retaining staff. More funding is needed both for direct services to clients, and to support the agencies and systems that help them.

We ask for your support of House Bill 6455 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

