



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 Human Services Committee

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

*In opposition to
House Bill 6703: An Act Concerning the
Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program*

February 21, 2023

Distinguished members of the Human Services Committee:

Thank you for holding this public hearing today. 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 providing a wide variety of services to nearly 200,000 low- and moderate-income people in all 169 cities and towns across the state. I have included more information about Community Action Agencies at the end of this testimony.

House Bill 6703 – An Act Concerning the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program

CAFCA opposes this bill, which would require Community Action Agencies to pay oil vendors electronically within 48 hours of receiving invoices.

As this Committee knows well, Connecticut's Community Action Agencies have been a long-running, essential partner to the State in administering the CT Energy Assistance Program (CEAP). The CAAs enroll individuals, connect them to hardship programs administered by the utilities, and coordinate delivery/payment of deliverable fuel vendors. To date this year, over 83,000 Connecticut residents have applied for CEAP; over 64,000 have been approved and are receiving assistance with their energy costs (over a 20% increase from this time last year).

For payment of vendors, the Department of Social Services (DSS) provides payments to CAAs, and CAAs then pay vendors after properly invoiced.

Connecticut General Statutes §16a-41a specifies that Community Action Agencies have 30 business days to pay deliverable fuel vendors. Notwithstanding the statute, for this program year, DSS has requested that CAAs make every effort to pay invoices no later than 10 business days after a complete invoice is received. CAAs have also been required to offer EFT payments upon vendor request.

To date this year, the vast majority of payments have been made within this 10-business-day timeframe. Exceptions have occurred in cases where the invoice and/or supporting documentation was incomplete, or rarely, if circumstances arose at individual CAAs that prevented speedy processing (e.g., staff out sick for a few days). All CAAs offer EFT payments to vendors upon request; however, many vendors prefer paper checks.

The proposed 48-hour timeframe is unreasonable. First, it is sometimes the case that the funds have not arrived at the CAA from DSS, and therefore cannot be passed along to the vendor. Additionally, for efficiency's sake, CAA finance departments (like most nonprofit and for-profit corporations) typically process payments in batches – not individual invoices within hours of receipt. Forty-eight hours also does not allow for payment of invoices received on Fridays (which would require payment on Sunday), or over holidays. The proposed language also does not require invoices to be complete; unfortunately, CAAs do receive incomplete invoices, which delays processing. And finally, CAAs oppose the requirement to pay all vendors by EFT – mostly because not all vendors want to be paid that way.

Our CAAs have relationships with their local deliverable fuel vendors, and we appreciate their participation in this important program. We are happy to work with the vendors, DSS, and this Committee to improve the experience in CEAP. However, we are unable to support this bill.

Thank you all for your service to our state. Please feel free to get in touch with any questions: deb@cafca.org or 860-832-9438.

More about Community Action Agencies

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.

Below is a Profile of Services table to this testimony, which shows the services provided by Community Action Agencies in Connecticut.

