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Public Hearing Testimony before the
Connecticut General Assembly's Human Services Committee

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

Supporting
Senate Bill 1052: An Act Concerning Area Agencies on Aging

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.

Senate Bill 1052: An Act Concerning Area Agencies on Aging

CAFCA supports this bill, which would fund navigators at the five Area Agencies on Aging, to help consumers find and obtain needed services. The array of services available to older adults is comprehensive, ranging from food/nutrition services to energy assistance to health insurance and more. However, the various age and income requirements for programs can also be confusing. Having one place to go to learn about the options and how to apply would be beneficial for anyone – and particularly for older adults who may not be familiar with the programs.

We also request that this bill be utilized to add funding to, and study the design of, the Meals on Wheels program. Increased costs for food, gasoline, and wages have combined to lead to a necessary reduction in services, as well as a cap on enrollment.

The need for Elderly Nutrition programs is increasing, due both to our aging population and to our state's efforts to help people age in place.

Between 2010 and 2040, Connecticut's population of people age 65 and older is projected to grow by 57%, but its population of people age 20 to 64 is projected to grow less than 2%. Overwhelmingly, these growing numbers of older adults want to stay in their communities and have choice, independence and dignity. To make that happen, we need age-diverse communities that support Connecticut residents across the lifespan. 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. Minimum wage is up 38.6% in the past 3-1/2 years (from \$10.10 to \$14/hour) and will increase again in June.

CAFCA is requesting that the state appropriate \$750,000 immediately, and annualize this over the next two years, to help providers restore their programs back to two meals/day and remove enrollment caps to serve the need in our communities.

Moreover, Connecticut's Community Action Agency Network proposes that the state research:

- ☞ How much elderly nutrition funding is needed to meet the needs of older adults in Connecticut over the next decade;
- ☞ 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 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.

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.

