

Board of Directors

Peter DeBiasi *Access* Community Action Agency, Inc.

Dr. Monette Ferguson

Alliance for Community Empowerment, Inc. (*formerly* ABCD)

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

Lena Rodriguez Community Renewal Team, Inc. (CRT)

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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 Appropriations Committee

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

Regarding House Bill 6659: An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2025 and Making Appropriations Therefor (General Government Agencies)

February 16, 2023

Distinguished members of the Appropriations 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 6659 – Human Services Agencies

CAFCA provides the following comments on aspects of the budget for the Department of Social Services:

Client Support Fund

CAFCA supports the governor's proposal to increase the Client Support Fund by \$10 million of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds.

The legislature and administration wisely created the Client Support Fund in 2021 to provide a flexible pot of funds for people with various unmet needs, due to the pandemic. The Fund is administered by CT's nine Community Action Agencies and was started this past Fall. Each applicant to the Fund is required to provide information about their income and their needs before receiving assistance, and Community Action Agencies have specific protocols and keep detailed records to ensure proper use of the Fund. Clients

can only access the Client Support Fund if other programs do not cover the services, or if they are over income for the services, or have reached the program's maximum benefit.

The Fund was created because Community Action Agencies were reporting that clients had needs that were not being met by existing programs. To date, these needs have varied from needing funds to pay for car repairs (so clients can get to work), to having emergency needs for food (and being out of SNAP benefits), to paying back taxes to avoid foreclosure. Although the Client Support Fund dollars are eligible for use through June 30, 2024, some of the Community Action Agencies have already expended their allocations – and all nine agencies expect to be out of funds by this June.

Therefore, we support the governor's proposal to add \$10 million of ARPA funds to this valuable program. The initial \$5 million will have been spent out, and need remains in our communities.

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CAFCA requests an increase in the HSI line item, to mirror any increases provided to other nonprofit organizations who may receive a cost of living allowance. We align our comments with those of the CT Nonprofit Alliance, in requesting increases of 9% in FY 2024 and 7% in FY 2025.

The HSI line item provides resources to Community Action Agencies (CAAs) to support the outcome orientated, holistic intake and assistance approach they use. Usually, grant funds are permitted to be used only for that specific grant; for example, SNAP outreach funds can only be used for SNAP outreach, but not to help that same customer with other needs. With HSI, Community Action Agencies conduct a comprehensive intake for each customer and his/her household, to allow them to assess for multiple needs and provide assistance with those needs at one time.

In order to keep up with rising costs, the HSI line item must be increased. The additional funds will support higher wages for CAA staff, to keep up with the higher minimum wage and wage compression, as well as higher rates for insurance and other costs. Ultimately, the increase will support continuity of services and strengthen the provision of services at Community Action Agencies.

CAFCA also provides comments on the Department of Aging & Disability Services budget:

Galderly Nutrition

CAFCA requests an increase of at least \$750,000 per year in elderly nutrition.

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.

Elderly 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 3½ years and will increase again in June.

These factors combine to create a crisis point for nutrition assistance programs. Additional funding is needed to ensure that providers are able to continue to deliver meals without reducing quality or frequency, or capping enrollment.

Thank you all for your consideration of these budget items – and as always, for your service to our state. Please feel free to get in touch with any questions: $\underline{deb@cafca.org}$ 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.

Services Provided by Connecticut's Community Action Agencies

	ACCE88	ALLIANCE	CAANH	CAAWC	CRT	HRA	NOI	TEAM	TVCCA
Financial Literacy & Asset Development									
Individual Development Accounts	T	· · · · ·			x	x	I		x
Financial Counseling	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Free Income Tax Preparation		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Child Care & Youth Development	-	-	-	-	-			-	-
CT Child Day Care & School Readiness	T	X		x	x	x	x	x	x
Head Start	+	x		-	-	x		x	x
Infant-Toddler/Early Head Start	<u> </u>	x			x	x	x	x	x
Specialized Care & Education					x	x			x
Youth Dev- After School & Summer Programs		x	x		x	x			
Community-wide Services						•			
Clothing Drive	T	x		x	x	x			x
Food Drive	+	x		r	x	x	x		x
Toy Drive		x		x	x		x	x	-
Criminal Justice									
Halfway Houses & Re-Entry	T				x		x		
Employment & Training									
Adult Education	T	x		x		x	x		
One-Stop Employment	1	-		-					x
Youth and Young Adults	x	x	x		x	x	x		x
Vocational & Skills Training	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Energy Assistance & Weatherization	-	-	-						
Energy Assistance & Emergency Fuel	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Matching Payment Programs	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	· ·	x
Home Energy Solutions/Weatherization	-	-		-	x	-	x		
Health	-				-				1
Adult Incontinence Supplies	1	x		<u> </u>		I	x	x	x
Counseling: Individual and/or Family	+	x	x		x	x	<u> </u>		
Diaper Bank		x	x	x			x	x	x
Health Care Access/Medical Transportation	+	^		^	x	x	x	x	
HIV/AIDS Prevention & Counseling	+				x	x		^	
Substance Abuse Prevention & Counseling	+	<u> </u>			x		<u> </u>		
Housing & Shelter								I	
		1			x	x	x	1	
Affordable and/or Subsidized Housing	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Emergency Rental/Mortgage Payment Emergency Shelter	x	*			x	*	x		
	-								
Eviction Prevention & Mediation	x	X	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Homelessness Prevention/Rapid Rehousing	x	x				x	x		x
Supportive Housing - Adults Supportive Housing - Youth	x				x			<u> </u>	x
Nutrition		I		I I		l	ļ		
	1					~	~	~	
Children & Adult Care Food Program	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Food Pantries	x			1					
Meals on Wheels/Congregate Meals	+				x	x	x	x	x
Summer Food Program	-			<u> </u>	1				~
Women, Infants & Children (WIC)	x	I	L	<u> </u>		I	L	I	x
Seniors									
RSVP & Senior Volunteer Programs		l		x	x		x	x	x
Senior Support Services	x		x		x	X	x	X	
Strengthening Families									
Family Development/Parenting Education		X	x		x	X	x	x	x
Holistic Case Management/Info & Referral	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x