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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.

### **Human Services Infrastructure (HSI)**

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:

### **Elderly 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: [deb@cafca.org](mailto:deb@cafca.org) or 860-832-9438.

