



**CAFCA**  
Connecticut Association  
for Community Action

Comments by Rhonda Evans, Interim Executive Director,  
before the Connecticut General Assembly's  
Appropriations, Human Services, and Public Health Committees

Public Hearing on the  
Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) Allocation Plan for FFY 2024

September 18, 2023

Distinguished Chairpersons, Vice-Chairpersons, Ranking Members, and Members  
of the Appropriations, Human Services, and Public Health Committees:

Thank you for holding this public hearing on the FFY 2024 Community Services  
Block Grant (CSBG) Allocation Plan. The Connecticut Association for  
Community Action (CAFCA) is the state association that works with  
Connecticut's nine Community Action Agencies (CAAs), the state and federal  
designated anti-poverty agencies serving over 185,000 low-income people in all  
169 cities and towns across Connecticut.

CAFCA is in support of the Department of Social Services' (DSS) FFY 2024  
allocation plan for CSBG, which provides base funding for Connecticut's  
Community Action Agencies. CSBG allows them to continue to provide programs  
and services to Connecticut's low-income residents, provide training and technical  
assistance to their staff to ensure maximum efficiency and effectiveness, meet  
federal requirements and standards, and – most importantly – meet the needs of  
their customers.

### *About Community Action Agencies*

Community Action Agencies are the state and federally designated antipoverty  
agencies, established by President Johnson to fight poverty and empower low-  
income people to be a catalyst for change. Today, there are over 1,000 CAAs  
nationwide that connect struggling individuals and families with essential support  
services and opportunities to help them become financially independent.

The Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) is an integral part of this work and  
provides Connecticut's CAA network with critical support for programs and  
services that address the needs of our most vulnerable residents. CSBG helps  
CAAs provide an effective service delivery system that is:

- Customer-focused
- Culturally sensitive
- Multigenerational
- Integrated

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Community Action Agencies recognize that people's needs are typically multi-faceted, and our comprehensive service delivery approach reflects that. If someone doesn't have enough money to buy food, they are likely struggling to afford other costs like housing, childcare, and more. Why is this important? Because it means that no matter the reason someone comes to our CAAs for help, they'll be guided through a service system that works to address both their short and long-term needs all in one place, helping them achieve and maintain economic stability.

CAAs are held accountable to stringent reporting requirements through the CSBG Annual Report, and must meet program measures through the organizational standards, state accountability measures, and the use of Results-Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA).

You can find demographic and other data about CAAs' work in our [Annual Report](#), as well as stories of people who have been helped by CAAs across our state. I hope you take a few minutes to review these important results, as they truly show Community Action's impact on Connecticut's most at-risk and vulnerable people.

### ***The Need for CSBG***

CSBG funding is essential for CAAs to help residents in need, both now and into the future. Connecticut's lagging economic growth, high wage gap between top, middle, and low-income earners<sup>1</sup>, and the impact of COVID-19 continue to make it harder for families to make ends meet.

But through CSBG, they're able to find hope at Community Action Agencies. CAAs are well-known and trusted in their communities, and conduct community needs assessments which are used to determine which programs, services, and resources will address the specific, unmet needs of people within the area they serve. CAAs also use CSBG funds for strategic planning to design and implement programs, provide training and technical assistance to CAA staff to improve organizational capacity, and assist with state and federal data reporting requirements. Also, CAAs partner with thousands of local, state, federal, and community-based organizations to coordinate and improve service integration.

Notably, these CSBG dollars are also critical in leveraging other funding including federal, state, local and private resource, and the value of volunteer hours that help the CAA Network strategically target the root causes of poverty at the local level.

### ***Impact of COVID-19 on CAA Operations***

CSBG funds played a key role in helping Connecticut's CAAs pivot agency operations during the COVID-19 crisis through infrastructure support and other resources, ensuring those facing financial struggles never experienced a gap in receiving services. As we moved into the recovery phase and the end of various moratoria, CAAs were there to help people facing utility shut-offs, evictions, and excess electric costs get back on their feet. As we continue with this "new normal," CAAs are still transitioning their service delivery as needed to address the ongoing impact of COVID-19, and CSBG helps make that possible.

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<sup>1</sup> Connecticut Voices for Children, *The State of Working Connecticut*. September 2023).

***Comments on the FY 2024 CSBG Allocation Plan***

CAFCA understands and supports the new CSBG allocation formula outlined in the plan, which complies with federal law. However, this means that three agencies will receive reduced CSBG funding. We are appreciative that DSS has agreed to use discretionary dollars to provide level funding to the three CAAs for FY 24 so that they can plan for the modified level of funding. We are hopeful that DSS will consider an additional year of level funding for the impacted agencies when the FY25 plan is subsequently developed as this will allow these CAAs more time to adjust to this change, ensuring agency operations and service delivery continue uninterrupted.

In closing, CSBG dollars continue to be a core, vital resource for CAAs to provide the programs, services, and support their communities need.

On behalf of Connecticut's Community Action Network, I would like to thank all of you, as well as Commissioner Barton Reeves and her team at the Department of Social Services, for your support of and advocacy for programs that serve low-income people in Connecticut and aim to help them improve their lives and communities. I am happy to discuss these funds and the work of Community Action Agencies further at your convenience.