



**August 31, 2016 Public Hearing Testimony before the  
Connecticut General Assembly  
Appropriations, Human Services, and Public Health Committees**

**COMMUNITY SERVICES BLOCK GRANT ALLOCATION PLAN FFY 2017**

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

Thank you for holding this hearing on the proposed Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) Allocation Plan for FFY 2017. My name is Deborah Monahan. I am the Executive Director of the Thames Valley Council for Community Action, Inc. (TVCCA) and Chair of the Connecticut Association for Community Action, Inc. (CAFCA). CAFCA is the state association for Connecticut's Community Action Agencies (CAAs), the state and federal designated anti-poverty agencies that serve each and every one of Connecticut's 169 cities and towns.

We are pleased to be here to support Commissioner Bremby and the Department of Social Services' FFY 2017 allocation plan for CSBG, and thank them for basing the amount on level FFY 2016 (less the one-time 6% increase). As you all know, CSBG provides our CAA network with essential, operational support for numerous critical human needs programs and services and help our agencies provide a holistic, customer-focused, multigenerational, integrated service delivery system for the individuals and families we serve every day. This comprehensive approach of 'no wrong door' means clients are accepted at any contact point within an agency and guided through a complex service system.

Although it has been eight years since the economic recession hit, Connecticut is still struggling to recover. According to the Connecticut Business and Industry Association (CBIA), Connecticut's post-recession economic recovery has been consistently behind the region and the country and the state's income disparities also continue to worsen. Over the past 30 years, incomes for the bottom 99 percent grew by just 14.5 percent, while the incomes of the top 1 percent swelled astronomically by 290.8 percent. This sudden growth encompasses a period in which the top 1 percent captured 71.6 percent of all income—meaning incomes of the top 1 percent are now 42.6 times greater than the bottom 99 percent.<sup>1</sup> It is clear that our status as one of the richest states in the country does not correlate to how well we're doing economically, and points to a persistent need in making sure our state's most at-risk and vulnerable residents have access to the resources, programs, and services they need to thrive and succeed.

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<sup>1</sup> Derek Thomas, "Connecticut's Income Inequality in Stark Contrast to its Prosperity," CT Mirror, July 15, 2016. Available from: <http://ctviewpoints.org/2016/07/15/top-one-percent-booms/>

One in ten people live in poverty in Connecticut, and more than 171,000 of them live on less than half of what the official federal poverty line was in 2014: a meager \$24,230 for a family of four. The situation is worse for people of color, who are disproportionately affected. While 6.1 percent of non-Hispanic whites are poor, that number is much higher for African Americans and Latinos, at nearly 21 percent and 26.5 percent, respectively.<sup>2</sup>

Children from low-income families don't fare much better. An analysis done by Connecticut Voices for Children earlier this year shows that the child poverty rate in Connecticut is higher than ever at nearly 15 percent, or 114,000 children. Once again, other factors such as race and geographic location impact the numbers. The rate for children of color, for example, is five-times greater than for white children. And, in Hartford, nearly half of the city's children are in poverty. That's three times the state poverty rate and 25 times the rate in comparison to some of Connecticut's wealthiest towns<sup>3</sup>.

Despite having so much working against them, individuals and families facing financial hardship do have somewhere to turn for help: their local Community Action Agency. Our agencies are well-known and trusted in their communities and, last year, more than 357,000 customers benefited from our programs and services statewide—an increase from 2014. We helped your constituents meet their immediate, short and long term needs, putting them on a path to self-sufficiency. You will see some examples of this information throughout our Results Based Accountability report, which is attached to my testimony. I hope you take a few minutes to review these results, for the numbers truly demonstrate the deep impact CAAs have on limited income individuals and families trying to make ends meet in every corner of the state.

And so, I would again like to thank Commissioner Bremby and our State CSBG Administrators, as well as the General Assembly—especially the committees represented here today—for understanding the importance of supporting the critical work our state's Community Action Agencies do on a daily basis. Our network prides itself on having a long-standing, 50+ year history of being Connecticut's safety net as well as a driving force in its economy. As we move into the next FFY, we will remain steadfast in our commitment to empowering low-income people and improving the communities in which they live—helping make a better Connecticut for us all.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to take any questions you may have.

(Enclosure: RBA report)

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<sup>2</sup> Connecticut Association for Human Services and the Coalition on Human Needs, "Too Many Connecticut Residents Remain in Poverty," October 7, 2015. Available from: <http://cahs.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Poverty-report.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Andrea Sears, "Connecticut Child Poverty at an All-Time High," Public News Service-CT, January 27, 2016. Available from: <http://www.publicnewsservice.org/2016-01-27/childrens-issues/connecticut-child-poverty-at-all-time-high/a50080-1>

# Community Action Community Services Block Grant

*Results That Matter*





## Community Services Block Grant

- 1981: Creation of the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) changed the regulatory and funding basis of Community Action Agencies.
- Community action became a funding stream administered by states.
- CSBG serves as core funding for Community Action Agencies and provides underlying support for all CAA functions.



## CT COMMUNITY ACTION: AGGREGATE RESULTS THAT MATTER

### How much did we do?

- More than 357,585 people statewide benefited from CAA services last year.
- 57,691 barriers to initial or continuous employment were reduced or eliminated.

### How well did we do it?

- Volunteers donated **over 614,953 hours** to the state's CAAs to help reduce poverty.
- Over **\$8.1 million was returned** to our state's economy with volunteer tax preparation assistance in 2015.
- CAAs engaged over 1,279 low-income people to participate in formal community organizations, government, boards, or councils that provide input to decision making and policy setting.

### Is anyone better off?

- More than 6,531 people went to work.
- Over 4,369 preschoolers are better prepared to start elementary school in the fall.
- Over 2,566 youth did better in school – socially, emotionally, athletically, and academically.
- Over 8,849 people live in safe and affordable housing.
- Almost 29,000 people received needed food from our food pantries.
- Over 41,306 senior citizens maintain an active, independent lifestyle.



## EMPLOYMENT & TRAINING

### How much did we do?

- **57,691 barriers to employment** were reduced or eliminated.
- 6,531 people obtained employment or self-employment.
- **12,497 people learned skills and competencies** required for employment.
- 847 youth obtained job skills.

### How well did we do it?

- Over 5,263 people increased their earned income and/or benefits from the previous year.

### Is anyone better off?

- Over 6,500 adults moved closer to self-sufficiency by going to work.
- Over 1,600 people completed their GED or post-secondary education in order to maintain their employment or increase their earnings from income.
- In 2015, median annual earnings for a high school dropout were \$25,636 compared with \$35,256 for a high school graduate and \$59,124 for a college graduate <sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Earning and unemployment rates by educational attainment, 2015," available from [http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep\\_chart\\_001.htm](http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep_chart_001.htm)



## FINANCIAL LITERACY & ASSET DEVELOPMENT

### How much did we do?

- 121 people opened savings accounts or an Individual Development Account (IDA) and **accumulated \$40,979 in savings.**
- 13 people purchased homes, 96 people funded education, and 22 purchased other assets such as vehicles through the IDA Program.
- Almost 6,000 tax returns were filed free of charge.
- 1,221 people operated within an established budget for at least 90 days.
- 2,464 individuals enrolled in telephone lifeline and/or received energy discounts and saved \$265,930.

### How well did we do it?

- Volunteers donated over 11,700 hours, saving over \$1.7 million in tax preparation fees.

### Is anyone better off?

- Families with assets are better able to weather economic storms.
- ***In 2015 over \$8.1 million was returned to our state's economy with volunteer tax preparation assistance.***
- Families are better able to prepare for the future. Children from low-income families with a savings account in their name are 4.5 times more likely to complete college than a child without one. <sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> William Elliott, William; Hyun-a Song, and Ilsung Nam, *Relationships Between College Savings and Enrollment, Graduation, and Student Loan Debt*, Center for Social Development, March 2013, available from: <https://csd.wustl.edu/Publications/Documents/RB13-09.pdf>



## EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

### How much did we do?

- Over 5,500 children participated in preschool activities that develop school readiness skills.
- 5,372 children obtained immunizations, medical and dental care.

### How well did we do it?

- 5,572 children participated in preschool activities and demonstrated improvement in school readiness skills.
- *Existing research suggests expanding early learning initiatives would provide benefits to society of **roughly \$8.60 for every \$1 spent**, about half of which comes from increased earnings for children when they grow up.<sup>3</sup>*

### Is anyone better off?

- 4,431 children are better prepared to start and succeed in school.
- Over 5,300 children are healthier because they received medical and/or dental care.
- Children in well-functioning homes are less likely to get into trouble in school, get involved with crime, have difficulty learning, or need other supportive services, all of which cost taxpayers.
- These programs lead to:
  - increased worker productivity
  - increased wages for parents
  - lower long term costs for law enforcement, welfare, health care and special education, etc.

3 Executive Office of the President, *The Economics of Early Childhood Investments*, December 2014, available at: [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/early\\_childhood\\_report1.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/early_childhood_report1.pdf)



## HOUSING & SHELTER

### How much did we do?

- Over **8,800 people obtained/or maintained safe and affordable housing.**
- More than 2,100 people received emergency shelter.
- Emergency rental/mortgage payments prevented over 2,180 individuals from becoming homeless.
- **116 safe and affordable housing units were created in the community.**
- **Over 7,700 safe and affordable housing units were preserved or improved through construction, weatherization, or rehabilitation.**
- Almost 800 individuals and families received supportive services to build self-sufficiency and/or independent living skills in Community Action Agency supportive or subsidized housing.

### How well did we do it?

- Over 1,800 individuals avoided eviction through mediation.
- Families were able to stay in their homes that were made safer and more energy efficient due preservation and improvements achieved by Community Action activity or advocacy.

### Is anyone better off?

- Families who live in safer, more stable housing can better manage their daily lives and their children's nutrition, health, development, and academic performance.



## ENERGY ASSISTANCE & WEATHERIZATION

### How much did we do?

- Over 90,000 households avoided crises with energy assistance.
- Over 6,750 homes were made a more stable and healthy home environment, and families decreased energy cost and use through weatherization services.
- Over 18,300 people were provided with energy conservation information.

### How well did we do it?

- Every dollar invested in energy efficiency generates \$2.80 in energy system benefits.<sup>4</sup>

### Is anyone better off?

- Low-income people avoided utility crises, resolved vendor disputes, improved environmental safety, and learned how to save money through energy conservation measures.
- Small businesses, oil vendors, gas, propane, electric, and utility companies across the state received nearly \$75M in payments, helping to stimulate the economy.

<sup>4</sup> Energy Efficiency Board, State of CT. *2015 Programs and Operations Report*. March 2015, available from: <http://www.energizect.com/sites/default/files/Final-ALR-2015-Full-030316.pdf>



## SENIOR SUPPORT SERVICES

### How much did we do?

- Over **41,300 seniors remained active in their communities by participating in community programs.**
- Almost 16,000 seniors maintained independent living through support services including home meal delivery, home health or homemaker services.

### How well did we do it?

- Over **19,400 senior citizens avoided institutionalization, saving about \$2.8 billion in nursing home costs in 2015.<sup>5</sup>**
- Over 8,200 senior citizens remained healthy and active by attending congregate meal sites.

### Is anyone better off?

- Over 41,300 senior citizens maintain an active, independent lifestyle.

<sup>5</sup> Based on the Connecticut average per diem nursing home rate of \$400, per [Seniorhomes.com/s/Connecticut/nursing-homes/#costs](http://Seniorhomes.com/s/Connecticut/nursing-homes/#costs)



## YOUTH DEVELOPMENT & AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMS

### How much did we do?

- 847 youth obtained job skills.
- 2,488 youth improved social/emotional development.
- 490 youth avoided at-risk behavior for at least 3 months.
- 514 youth reduced involvement with the criminal justice system.
- Over 2,566 youth increased their academic, athletic or social skills through participating in after-school programs.
- 452 fathers participated in classes and activities to strengthen their parenting skills.

### How well did we do it?

- *For every dollar invested in early childhood and youth development, an average of \$16 in benefits is returned to the economy.*<sup>6</sup>
- 628 at-risk children and youth of DCF placement remained with family because of improved family functioning.
- 166 youth received supportive services to build self-sufficiency and/or independent living skills.

### Is anyone better off?

- Kids gained a stronger foundation for an economic self-sufficient life.
- Kids did better in school – socially, emotionally, athletically and academically.
- Families stayed together and functioned better.



## HEALTH & COUNSELING SERVICES

### How much did we do?

- Over 8,600 people obtained access to needed health care.
- Over 3,200 youth improved physical health and development.
- 490 youth learned how to avoid at-risk behavior.
- Over 500 youth reduced involvement with the criminal justice system.

### How well did we do it?

- 4,697 participants improved their family functioning and/or behavior because of counseling.
- 5,536 parents/caregivers improved family functioning as a result of classes or supportive services.

### Is anyone better off?

- Thousands of low-income people statewide lived healthier lives because of the access to health care they received.
- Children in well-functioning homes are less likely to get into trouble in school, get involved in crime, have difficulty, or need other supportive services. Our programs help strengthen families, keep communities safe and save tax payers money.



## NUTRITION SERVICES

### How much did we do?

- Over **87,000 people** received emergency or supplemental food from our food pantries.
- Over 15,800 seniors participated in congregate meal programs or receive home-delivered meals.
- Over 15,100 children and youth benefited from congregate meals.
- Over 6,600 people received emergency vouchers for food, formula and/or diapers.

### How well did we do it?

- Almost 7,000 children and youth were provided with nutritious snacks and meals through Community Action summer congregate meals.

### Is anyone better off?

- Hunger and *food insecurity* (i.e., reduced food intake and disrupted eating patterns because a household lacks money and other resources for food) might increase the risk for lower dietary quality and undernutrition. In turn, undernutrition can negatively affect overall health, cognitive development, and school performance.<sup>7</sup>
- Pregnant women had healthier pregnancies and healthier babies.



## CT CAAs LEVERAGE RESULTS THAT MATTER

### How much did we do?

- CT CAAs brought **over \$146 million** of federal funding into CT to fight the causes and effects of poverty in 2015.
- In 2015, our network reported 2,227 partnerships:
  - 1,346 partnerships to improve and coordinate service.
  - 1,109 partnerships to improve community planning.
  - 1,416 partnerships to achieve improved outcomes.
- Over 614,950 volunteer hours were donated to CT CAA's in 2015.

### How well did we do it?

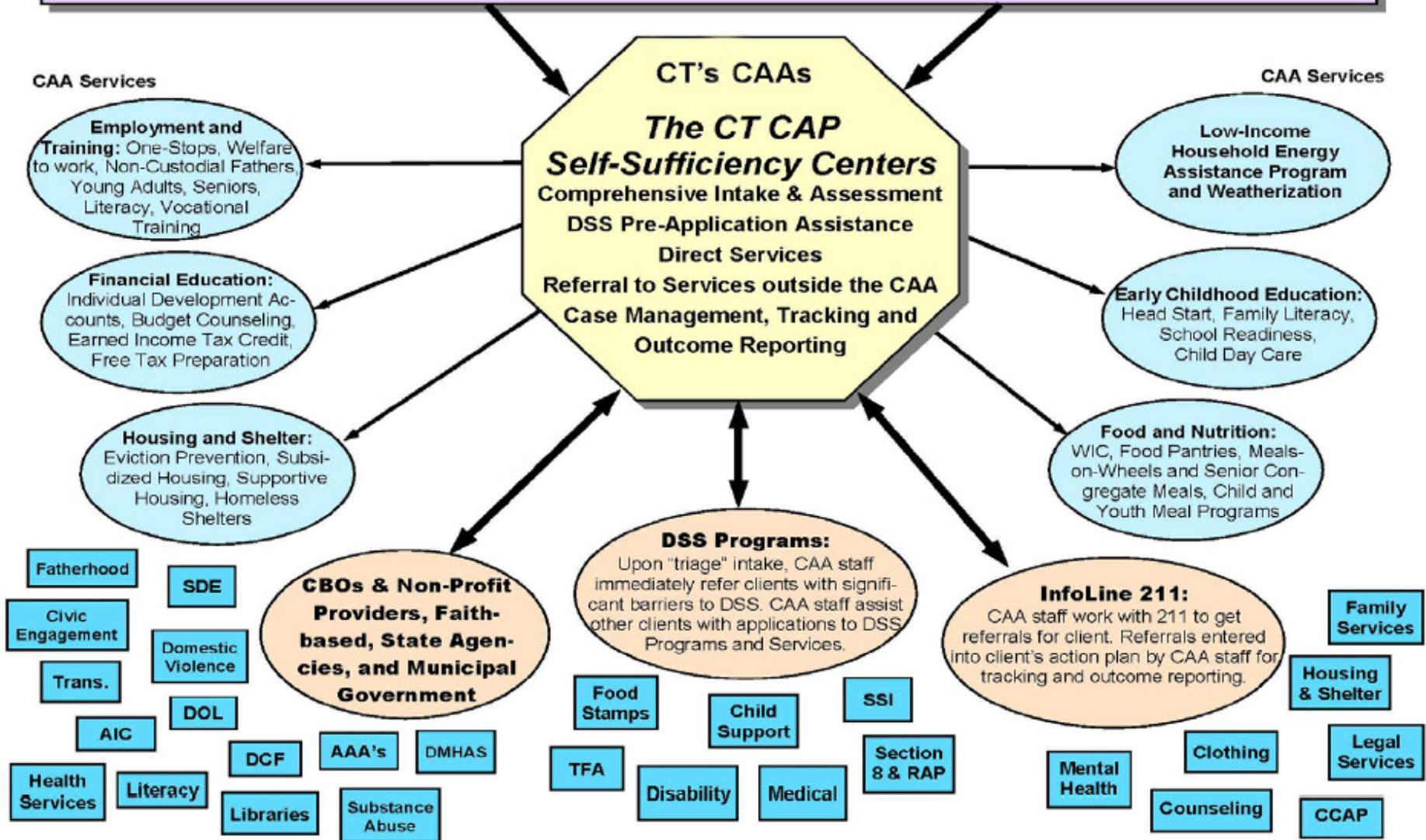
- CT CAAs leverage funding sources & community volunteers to fight poverty efficiently.
- ***For every \$1 of CSBG, the CT CAA Network leveraged \$30.41 from federal, state, local, and private resources, including the value of volunteer hours.***
- Using CSBG/HSI funds, CAA's form a statewide network to provide a one-stop center of service delivery. Low-income residents connect to the network efficiently and easily.
- CAA organizations are lean and efficient because of leveraged funding, partnerships that share resources, dedicated staff, and community volunteers.

### Is anyone better off?

- Over 357,580 low-income CT residents from 147,073 families are working towards improved self-sufficiency.
- All CT residents benefit from taxpayer dollars that are efficiently and well spent.

# Connecticut Community Action Agencies

## Low-Income Individuals and Families Walk-ins and Referrals from DSS, InfoLine 211, and others



# Connecticut's Community Action Agencies

- Action for Bridgeport Community Development, Inc. (ABCD) [www.abcd.org](http://www.abcd.org)
- Access Community Action Agency (Access) [www.accessagency.org](http://www.accessagency.org)
- Bristol Community Organization, Inc. (BCO) [www.bcact.org](http://www.bcact.org)
- Community Action Agency of New Haven, Inc. (CAANH) [www.caanh.net](http://www.caanh.net)
- Community Action Agency of Western Connecticut, Inc. (CAAWC) [www.caawc.org](http://www.caawc.org)
- Community Renewal Team, Inc. (CRT) [www.crtct.org](http://www.crtct.org)
- Human Resources Agency of New Britain, Inc. (HRA) [www.hranbct.org](http://www.hranbct.org)
- New Opportunities, Inc. (NOI) [www.newoppinc.org](http://www.newoppinc.org)
- TEAM, Inc. (TEAM) [www.teaminc.org](http://www.teaminc.org)
- Thames Valley Council for Community Action, Inc. (TVCCA) [www.tvcca.org](http://www.tvcca.org)