



C A F C A

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Good morning Senator Meyer, Representative McMahon, and members of the Select Committee on Children. My name is Phil McKain and I am President/CEO of CTE, Inc., the Community Action Agency in Stamford and Greenwich and a Board member and immediate past President of the Connecticut Association for Community Action. Also with me is Edith Karsky, Executive Director of CAFCA. CAFCA is the statewide association representing Connecticut's twelve community action agencies.

Community Action Agencies (CAAs) are the federally designated anti-poverty agencies, initiated during President Johnson's "War on Poverty" in 1964. For more than forty years, Connecticut's CAAs have coordinated human services, empowered people to become more self-sufficient, improved communities, and built partnerships to address the conditions of poverty.

Last year Connecticut CAAs provided services that benefited more than 266,000 people and more than 107,000 families, including about 93,000 children. CT CAAs provide a diverse array of services in every city and town, including employment and training, early childhood education such as Head Start, and school readiness, energy assistance, financial literacy, individual development accounts and federal EITC, housing services, and many others.

CT CAAs are also foundational partners in Connecticut's Human Services Infrastructure (HSI) along with the Department of Social Services and 211 Infoline. HSI is an integrated, statewide, results-based service delivery system that achieves positive results. Every person that walks through our doors receives a universal intake and pre-assessment to identify their needs. Services are coordinated to address those needs and achieve the best possible outcomes for the family.

An essential part of HSI is our Results-based Accountability system called ROMA (Results-Oriented Management and Accountability). This system measures client, agency and community outcomes and provides funding sources program performance data and data on the return on investment. We are the only statewide service provider network that uses a Results-based Accountability system. We have a statewide information system that links the 12 CAAs together and is an effective, prevention-based strategy that breaks down program "silos" and measures client progress toward self-sufficiency.

I ask you to review our Annual Report, which is in your packets. It documents our results and the return-on-investments that were achieved. In addition, the report shows the cities and towns that our agencies serve and the services they provide in your communities.

We are very proud of our statewide, integrated, results-based service delivery system and believe it is an important strategy in helping low-income families move towards self-sufficiency. However, our primary purpose today is to provide the Committee with information that we

believe you will find very useful and important in assisting the state in achieving its groundbreaking public policy goal of reducing child poverty by 50% by 2014.

In our conversations with national anti-poverty leaders, it has become clear that many people across our nation are watching Connecticut to see how we address this challenge of reducing child poverty. In fact, Connecticut's Child Poverty law is being touted as a national model.

We believe this is the most important public policy to emerge in many years and the Connecticut CAAs have adopted a strategic plan that aims to work with the Child Poverty and Prevention Council and other policymakers and leaders and do whatever we can to help achieve the goal of reducing child poverty by 50%.

CAFCA Legislative Priorities for Reducing Child Poverty

Connecticut's response to the urgent reality of child poverty and its adoption of the goal to reduce child poverty by 50% has been bold and imaginative. Our priorities recommend building on proven approaches that will effectively address the challenge of reducing child poverty in our state.

Recently, Great Britain has reported positive results in their efforts to eliminate child poverty by 2020, reducing it by 23% in 5 years, just short of their target of 25%. This has been achieved in large part by instituting programs modeled after successful American efforts, such as Head Start, Individual Development Accounts and the Earned Income Tax Credit. Great Britain's results shows that we can be successful if we build upon and expand the programs we know work.

Reduce Child Poverty by expanding proven programs and successful models.

Child poverty has been on the increase in Connecticut in recent years. According to the National Center for Child Poverty, 11.6% of all children live below the federal poverty line in Connecticut. This is an increase from 9.8% in 2002.

And as you know, while the overall child poverty rate is lower in Connecticut than most states, Connecticut also has some of the highest concentrations of poverty in the nation. Across the state, Connecticut's urban cities have the largest percentage of poor and low-income children. Hartford, for instance, has the second highest child poverty rate in the country for a city of its size. The destructive effects of poverty are well documented and I know we all agree that reducing child poverty is critically important for the future economic health of our state.

To reduce child poverty, the General Assembly will need to carefully target and focus the state's precious resources towards where they will do the most good. That is why we call upon you to expand programs that have been proven to help low-income children and families succeed programs such as Head Start and Early Head Start.

Last year in Connecticut, Head Start served 6,570 three and four year olds and Early Head Start served 439 infants and toddlers. 34,366 children aged 0 to 5 (14%) live below the federal poverty line in Connecticut. This means that more than 25,000 of Connecticut's poorest children and families do not receive the benefits of the comprehensive services offered by Head Start and Early Head Start programs in Connecticut.

The success of Head Start and Early Head Start is explained by the vast amount of research conducted on both programs. Head Start and Early Head Start are both two-generation programs that serve children and parents. Head Start and Early Head Start seek to promote positive development in children by providing services to the children, supporting parents in their parenting, and promoting the family's self-sufficiency and healthy functioning by providing access to education and job-training activities and health services.

These programs provide activities and services that directly promote children's development. For example, programs are required to provide education, conduct developmental assessments, and encourage parent involvement in child development services and health services. Programs are required to focus on strengthening parenting through activities such as home visits, parenting education, and to develop individualized family partnership agreements that set goals for families and ensure access to needed services and community resources. And Head Start programs that are part of or connected to the local Community Action Agency are even more effective, since the CAA provides so many additional services to the child and family, such as extended child care, financial management, asset development, federal EITC and Volunteer Income Tax Assistance, energy assistance, language and math literacy, and many other additional programs to assist the family's efforts towards self-sufficiency.

The *2005 Head Start Impact Study* found:

- Statistically significant positive impacts for 3- and 4-year-old children enrolled in Head Start on pre-reading, pre-writing, vocabulary, and parent reports of children's literacy skills.
- A higher proportion of Head Start parents read to their children more frequently than those parents of children who were not enrolled in Head Start.
- Head Start, for the most part, offers a more comprehensive set of higher quality services than state Pre-K programs have.

Despite these very positive results, federal Head Start funding was recently cut by 1%, and with level funding for the previous 6 years, it actually represents a reduction of about 11%. State Head Start funding has been reduced by 19% from 2003 to 2006 when adjusted for inflation. These cuts have had a serious negative impact on our programs. For example one program had to cut the length of the day from 9 hours down to 6, one program went from a 5 day week to a 4 day week, another program had to close classrooms, and almost all programs have had to eliminate transportation. And, of course, with such cuts it is almost impossible for an anti-poverty agency to provide even a basic cost-of-living increase to our Head Start teachers and aides.

All CT Head Start programs have long waiting lists. Currently, CAAs that operate these programs have about 365 children on the waiting list and about 310 infants and toddlers on the waiting list for Early Head Start. If we had the funds to serve the families on our waiting lists and open our enrollment to additional families in cities and towns with high poverty rates, we could begin to address the causes and effects of poverty and provide the educational, health and socializing opportunities these families so desperately need.

We strongly encourage the General Assembly to think carefully about where they allocate limited resources. We believe that resources for pre-K should be focused on proven models like Head Start and Early Head Start that provide comprehensive family services such as dental, health, literacy and parenting skills.

In order to achieve the goals of the Child Poverty Reduction and Prevention Council, the state should invest in quality, full-day/full-year, comprehensive early childhood education and expand proven programs that work such as Head Start and Early Head Start, rather than spend precious state resources on new systems and bureaucracies.

- We ask that the state legislature expand state Head Start and Early Head Start funding by \$10 million over two years. Our proposed increase will allow us to serve those children on the waiting list and expand Early Head Start services;
- Expanding Head Start is a cost-effective investment because the programs have comprehensive services and proven strategies already in place; and
- Head Start also has a results-based system of accountability, with the necessary data systems already installed and reports outcome data through its national reporting system. CAFCA is developing a bridge between HSI and the Head Start data system.

Low-income families need a compensatory model for early childhood education, a model such as Head Start and Early Head Start that supports family development, literacy, parenting education, and empowerment, is more likely to achieve the results that the state desires. None of the other preschool options available offer this comprehensive approach to breaking the cycle of poverty. That is why we recommend a significant state investment in Head Start and Early Head Start as the most cost-effective approach to achieving the desired results.

Other legislative priorities that we believe will contribute to reducing child poverty include expanding other proven programs, such as:

- ***Restore funding to the Human Services Infrastructure-Community Action Program.*** As shown in our Annual Report, HSI is a proven, results-based approach to providing services. Since 1992, we have seen a 66% reduction in state support for the community action network. We call for funding to be restored for the state's CAAs in order to:
 - Expand the number of poor families across all communities that receive results-based integrated services;
 - Expand outreach to at-risk families with young children to ensure they are connected to needed services; and
 - Assist in community development opportunities in low-income neighborhoods.
- ***Expand opportunities for working families to save & build assets.*** Asset building opportunities for working families are important stepping-stones towards achievement of self-sufficiency. We recommend that the state:
 - Create a refundable State Earned Income Tax Credit program at 20% of federal EITC;
 - Expand the Connecticut Individual Development Account program by \$500,000 over two years; and
 - Expand outreach and tax assistance to increase federal EITC receipts in the state.

- ***Provide funds for After School Tutoring initiatives that are targeted towards reducing Connecticut's unacceptable achievement gap.*** Utilize experienced CAAs and other community-based organizations to target closing the achievement gap.

Connecticut's public policy response to the urgent reality of child poverty has been bold and imaginative, but in order to succeed it will require additional commitments from the state's local communities. The Child Policy Council Plan should give communities a role in partnering with state government in this critically important transformational change.

All sectors in Connecticut must be engaged if we are to succeed in reducing child poverty by 50%. Business, the faith community, education, social services, the philanthropic community, civic groups and other stakeholders will have to commit to the child poverty agenda in order for it to have the resources, leadership and innovation required for success. Low-income citizens also must be invited to participate in the process. Currently, the child poverty agenda is not well known by the citizens of the state. Unless we change its current low state profile, the child poverty agenda is unlikely to succeed.

Therefore, we propose that the state designate Connecticut Community Action Agencies as local coordinating entities of community efforts to address the state's goal to reduce child poverty by 50% by 2014.

- As the federally designated anti-poverty agencies, CAAs are ready to provide this coordinating function. CT CAAs have committed to the goal of reducing child poverty by 50% by 2014.
- Community Action Agency Boards of Directors are a partnership of public, private and low-income representatives already working together at the local level to end poverty. The CAA Board is the perfect starting point for engaging local stakeholders in this effort.
- Our agencies report more than 501 partnerships at the local level to coordinate efficient and effective services to meet the needs of low-income residents. We know that we cannot do this work alone, and therefore we have become the leaders in our communities developing partnerships aimed at ending poverty and achieving results.
- HSI and our Results-based Accountability system is a statewide system that measures the performance of programs and document the return on investment.
- Each CAA provides programming that is relevant to their local community needs.
- CAAs are also places where innovative solutions to poverty can emerge. For example, ABCD, in the greater Bridgeport area, has developed a coalition with the city and superintendent of schools to initiate an educational program this year called 'Total Learning' that involves 25 Head Start graduates using the 'Total Learning' model from Kindergarten through the sixth grade. An extensive evaluation will be done and results will be made public.

The Connecticut effort to reduce child poverty is gaining greater attention nationwide. For both moral and economic imperatives, reducing child poverty must be one of our top priorities as a state. We urge the Governor and state legislature to fully utilize CT's anti-poverty network, the Community Action Agencies, in order to reach this important goal.

In closing, we would like to thank you for the opportunity to present this information about CT CAAs to you today. As you can see, CAFCA and our 12 Community Action Agencies are positioned well to be the local coordinating entities of the recommendations coming out of the Council to reduce child poverty by 50% by 2014. We provide integrated and customer focused services for the low-income community, we report results on a local and statewide basis, and perhaps most importantly, we are the federally designated anti-poverty agencies. As our mission states: The Connecticut Association for Community Action (CAFCA) is a network of community action agencies that builds communities, promotes public policy and develops leaders to end poverty in Connecticut. We look forward to working with you in the bold and important initiative.