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Public Hearing Testimony before the
Connecticut General Assembly's Appropriations Committee

Governor's Proposed FY 2025 Midterm Budget Adjustments
Department of Social Services

Rhonda Evans, Interim Executive Director
Connecticut Association for Community Action, Inc. (CAFCA)

February 21, 2024

Distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

Thank you for holding this public hearing about the Governor's budget proposals for the upcoming fiscal year. 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 that provide a wide variety of services to nearly 200,000 low- and moderate-income people in all 169 cities and towns across the state. More information about Community Action Agencies is included at the end of this testimony.

I am writing to discuss our concerns with the creation of Opportunity Centers proposed by Governor Lamont.

The Governor's proposal creates a coordinated service delivery model for various state agencies by co-locating staff at Opportunity Centers to deliver social services by leveraging state and local community partnerships to help residents attain self-sufficiency. It also allocates \$1M in bond funding to refurbish a space in Hartford to pilot the program.

Connecticut's Community Action Agencies already use a very similar service delivery model and can provide invaluable support in this effort.

About Community Action Agencies

For over 50 years, Community Action Agencies, the largest statewide safety net service provider, have been connecting neighbors in need with resources that stabilize and improve lives and communities. By using a holistic, comprehensive, multigenerational, approach – much like the one outlined in the Governor's proposal – called the Human Services Infrastructure, or HSI, CAAs work with people in need to plan, achieve, and maintain a realistic path

to short and long-term economic self-sufficiency and success. This “no wrong door” approach helps ensure that anyone who comes into a Community Action Agency for any reason gets assessed for all programs, services, and resources they may be eligible for. These 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

A Profile of Services table is at the end of this testimony and shows the services provided by Community Action Agencies.

Community Action’s state partnerships

Connecticut’s CAA Network also partners with other state agencies like the Department of Labor (DOL) and Department of Social Services (DSS) on the provision of service delivery. Some agencies are even located at or within DSS offices; for example, Thames Valley Council for Community Action (TVCCA) is located right across the street from DSS in Norwich. And New Opportunities, Inc. (NOI) shares office space with DSS in their Torrington location.

Data and reporting

The Governor’s proposal also includes \$2M in existing ARPA funding for MyCT, which is intended to strengthen the technology platform for intake, coordination of care, and service delivery. Community Action Agencies are experienced and well-positioned to take an active role in this project because all agencies use a service delivery intake system for their customers. This allows for common data collection and reporting to demonstrate statewide impact and results.

To be clear, we support additional funding to nonprofits that will enable them to provide services and resources efficiently and effectively. But rather than reinvent the wheel and duplicate efforts, we ask that Connecticut’s Community Action Network be included in the conversation. Let’s talk about how we can use our statewide reach and partnerships with state agencies like DSS to best serve Connecticut residents in need and help them reach their full potential.

Thank you for your consideration and for your service to our state. Please feel free to get in touch with any questions at rhonda@cafca.org or 860-305-2937.

