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

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

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

February 28, 2025

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 more than 200,000 low- and moderate-income people in all 169 cities and towns across the state.

I am writing to comment on expanding the Opportunity Center Pilot proposed by Governor Lamont.

The Governor's proposal continues to develop 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 funding to expand the current Opportunity Center site in Hartford area and further expand to an additional site.

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

For over 60 years, Community Action Agencies have been connecting people in need with resources that help stabilize and improve lives and communities. Developed in partnership with the Department of Social Services (DSS), our CAAs use a holistic, comprehensive, multigenerational approach called the Human Services Infrastructure, or HSI – much like the coordinated service delivery model outlined in the Governor's proposal. CAAs work with their customers to plan, achieve, and maintain a realistic path to short and long-term

economic self-sufficiency and success, and 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 breadth of services provided by Community Action Agencies.

For decades, Connecticut’s CAA Network has also partnered with state agencies like the Department of Social Services (DSS) and the Department of Labor (DOL) on the provision of service delivery. Additionally, several CAAs have multiple offices with satellite staff and 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) is located in the same office space as DSS and the American Job Center at their Torrington location.

While we support additional funding to nonprofits that will enable them to provide services and resources efficiently and effectively, the Opportunity Center model is at the intersection of what we do – and CAAs have been utilizing that model in collaboration with state agencies for years.

Rather than reinvent the wheel and duplicate efforts, we ask that Connecticut’s Community Action Network be included in the conversation as the state moves forward with Opportunity Center pilots.

Finally, thank you for recognizing the work we do and for keeping our funding intact. We look forward to working with you and the Department in the future to serve our state’s most vulnerable residents 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.

