



*Testimony before the Appropriations  
and Human Services Committees  
Commissioner Deidre S. Gifford, MD, MPH  
September 28, 2022*

*Community Services Block Grant Program*

Good morning Chairs Osten, Walker, Moore and Abercrombie; Ranking Members Miner, France, Berthel and Case; and distinguished members of the Appropriations and Human Services Committees. My name is Deidre Gifford, and I am the Commissioner of the Department of Social Services (DSS).

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of Governor Lamont’s Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2023 allocation plan for the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG). In addition to this written testimony, I am pleased to be able to walk through our proposed FFY 2023 allocation plan with you today. I am joined by representatives from the Department who will be available to help respond to questions.

**Overview - Purpose**

CSBG is administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) through its administrative agency, the Administration for Children and Families, Office of Community Services. DSS is designated as the principal state agency for the allocation and administration of the block grant within the State of Connecticut. Within DSS, the Division of Program Oversight & Grant Administration, Office of Community Services maintains responsibility for the administration and oversight of CSBG.

CSBG provides funding to states and local communities, working through a network of Community Action Agencies (CAAs) to reduce poverty, revitalize low-income communities, and empower low-income families and individuals to become fully self-sufficient.

The Department is proud to administer the CSBG and to advocate for the importance and value of CSBG and the work of the CAAs. Through CSBG funding, the CAAs, together with the Department and state and local partners, seek to identify, address, and eliminate barriers faced by the state’s most vulnerable households and communities in pursuit of the following community action goals:

- Individuals and families with low incomes are stable and achieve economic security;
- Communities where low-income people live are healthy and offer economic opportunities; and
- People with low incomes are engaged and active in building opportunities in communities.

The Department is grateful for the continued support and commitment of Governor Lamont, the General Assembly, the Office of Policy and Management, our partners in the community action

agencies and stakeholders throughout the state for their support and assistance with the CSBG program.

**Estimated Federal Funding, Total Available Funding and Proposed Allocations**

During FFY 2022, the Community Services Block Grant was funded at a national level of \$755 million. At the time of the development of this plan, federal funding for FFY 2023 has not yet been finalized. To ensure the timely development of this allocation plan, we have assumed a FFY 2023 funding allocation of \$8,966,690, which is equal to the state’s final FFY 2022 allocation.

In total, available funding for FFY 2023 is estimated at \$13,959,760, made up of \$8,966,690 in estimated federal block grant funding and \$4,993,070 in estimated carryforward. Of the total available funding for FFY 2023, this plan proposes to expend \$9,072,115 and to carry forward \$4,887,645 as a contingency in the event of a decrease in federal funding or for one-time expenditures in future years to support identified needs of the CAA network.

HHS requires that at least 90% of the allocated CSBG funds made available to the state through the federal block grant are administered through grants to CAAs, Community Action Programs or Limited Purpose Agencies (LPAs), collectively referred to as “eligible entities.” In Connecticut there are nine CAAs and one LPA, the Connecticut Association for Community Action (CAFCA), that qualify for CSBG funding.

The remaining 10% of the proposed FFY 2023 block grant funding, a total of \$896,670, is split evenly to support costs of administration and for discretionary projects.

<b>PROGRAM CATEGORY</b>	<b>FFY 2023 PROPOSED EXPENDITURES</b>
Grants to Eligible Entities	\$8,175,445
Discretionary Programs	448,335
Administration	448,335
<b>TOTAL</b>	\$9,072,115
Block Grant	\$8,966,690
Carry Forward from FFY 2022	4,993,070
<b>TOTAL FUNDS AVAILABLE</b>	\$13,959,760

Subject to the approval of this plan, if the final block grant allocation to Connecticut is greater or less than the estimate used to develop this plan, we are required by HHS to proportionately adjust each of the recommended allocations. Further, if following the approval of this plan, the Department proposes to make transfers to or from any specific allocation over \$50,000 or 10% of a specific allocation, whichever is less, the Department will resubmit this plan to the joint committees of cognizance in compliance with section 4-28b of the Connecticut General Statutes.

The proposed FFY 2023 allocations to the CAAs were calculated using the base amounts established pursuant to §17b-888 of the Connecticut General Statutes. These amounts are set forth in Table D on page 12 of the proposed plan, reproduced in part below:

<b>MAJOR PROGRAM CATEGORIES</b>	<b>FFY 2023 PROPOSED EXPENDITURES (including carry forward funds)</b>
<b>Grants to Eligible Entities</b>	
Alliance for Community Empowerment (ACE)	\$1,185,062
ACCESS Agency, Inc.	493,350
Community Action Agency of New Haven, Inc. (CAANH)	1,182,958
Community Action Agency of Western Connecticut, Inc.	739,635
Community Renewal Team, Inc. (CRT)	1,944,812
Connecticut Association for Community Action (CAFCA)	248,369
Human Resources Agency of New Britain, Inc. (HRANB)	558,981
New Opportunities, Inc. (NOI)	1,094,550
TEAM, Inc.	239,981
Thames Valley Council for Community Action, Inc. (TVCCA)	487,747
<b>Formula Allocations – Total</b>	<b>\$8,175,445</b>
<b>Discretionary Programs</b>	<b>448,335</b>
<b>State Agency Administration</b>	<b>448,335</b>
<b>TOTAL CSBG</b>	<b>\$9,072,115</b>

CSBG funds are primarily used by CAAs to: plan, organize and coordinate the delivery of services within their community; encourage members of the community to support, develop and implement innovative and effective approaches to address the causes of poverty; broaden the resource base for community-centered programs and services; and to support the CAA’s core administrative expenses. CSBG is the core funding source for the state’s CAA network and such funds are required to be used by the CAAs to serve or improve the well-being of individuals with incomes at or below 125% of the federal poverty level (\$34,688 for a family of four).

The CAAs use a holistic approach to address the immediate, short-term, and long-term needs of low- and moderate-income individuals and families to help them achieve and maintain economic self-sufficiency. Programs administered by the CAAs include, but are not limited to: energy assistance, water assistance and weatherization; housing and shelter; employment and training; early childhood education; financial education; case management; and food and nutrition services.

Through CSBG funding, the CAAs provide services that are designed to help low-income people to become self-sufficient and to improve living conditions for themselves and their community. Working in partnership with other service providers, businesses, faith-based organizations, and the advocacy community, CAAs strive to strengthen families and their environments to help low-income people lead more secure lives.

Administrative funds are used by the Department to support the staff needed to ensure the Department's ability to perform required programmatic and fiscal oversight, provide training, monitor CSBG activities, and support indirect costs and other one-time expenditures.

Funds allocated for discretionary projects are used by the Department to support training, technical assistance, compliance monitoring, technology support, statewide projects and special initiatives to strengthen the CAA network, and the development and implementation of innovative services and programs that align with the purposes of the CSBG Act. CSBG discretionary resources will be utilized as follows: 80% capacity building activities; 15% other CSBG purposes; and 5% other purposes to support Connecticut's compliance with the CSBG Act. Examples of services funded through discretionary resources include training and technical assistance for Results Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA) training, Center of Excellence Organizational Standards performance benchmark initiative, CAA network support, data warehouse annual maintenance, board training, conferences, meetings, annual needs assessments, etc.

### **Federal Requirements**

As the recipient of the Community Services Block Grant, DSS is obligated to ensure that federal funds are used and expended in accordance with federal requirements. DSS conducts on-site and remote program and fiscal monitoring of each CAA to verify program accomplishments and to ensure adherence to applicable federal and state statutes, rules, regulations, the CSBG community action plan, and the terms of contracts between DSS and each CAA.

The Department also performs the federally mandated CSBG triennial review, which requires DSS to conduct a full on-site review of each CAA at least once during each three-year period, as well as to assess compliance with the organizational standards put forth by HHS. The Department provides the CAA a report detailing the findings from the review and requires the CAA to develop and submit a technical assistance plan to correct any identified risk or compliance finding.

The Department continues to work closely with the CAAs to strengthen and improve the CAA network. This unique partnership represents a commitment to improve and maximize the efficiencies of Connecticut's human service delivery system to ensure those in need can obtain the services and supports they desire.

We join the Governor and the Office of Policy and Management in recommending the approval of the Community Services Block Grant allocation plan for federal fiscal year 2023.