



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

Social 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 Social Services Block Grant (SSBG). 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

SSBG is administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 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 in the State of Connecticut. SSBG is a flexible funding source that allows states and territories to tailor social service programming to their population’s needs. The plan before you forecasts FFY 2023 block grant funding of \$17.4 million and estimated carryforward funding¹ of \$5.7 million, for estimated total SSBG funding of \$23.1 million. The plan proposes FFY 2023 expenditures of \$18.1 million.

Major Use of Funds

Through SSBG, Connecticut provides essential social services that help achieve several goals: to reduce dependency and promote self-sufficiency; to protect children and adults from neglect, abuse and exploitation; and to help individuals who are unable to take care of themselves to stay in their homes or to find the best alternative living arrangements. Part I, Section B on pages 3-5, of the proposed allocation plan provides more detail related to the major use of SSBG funds.

The FFY 2023 SSBG allocation plan provides funding for services in 12 of the allowable 29 federally defined service categories. Such services include the following: case management services,

¹ Carryforward funding is used to ensure continuity of contractual funding early in the fiscal year and during provider transitions, as well as to create a buffer for changes in need during the fiscal year. In the event that the block grant allocation is reduced or need rises significantly such that more funding appears to be required for specific allocations, the Department will follow procedures for advising and requesting approvals from the committees of cognizance.

counseling, employment, family planning services, home-based services, home delivered meals, independent & transitional living services, legal services, protective services for adults, special services for persons with developmental or physical disabilities, and other services. The complete listing of categories can be found in Table A on page 9 of the plan.

Contingency Plan

If the block grant funding is less than estimated, an equally proportionate share of the reduction shall be applied to each category. Pursuant to section 4-28b of the Connecticut General Statutes, any transfers to or from any specific allocation over \$50,000 or 10% of a specific allocation, whichever is less, would require resubmission to the joint committees of cognizance.

Target Population

Although 29 service categories are allowable, the categories identified in this allocation plan are based upon Connecticut's efforts to address barriers and gaps in services for its most vulnerable populations that meet the criteria identified on page 5 of the plan under the heading "The Target Population." Based upon need, categories can change from year to year. With the exception of the SSBG service categories of employment services and home delivered meals, recipients of SSBG funded services must have annual income no higher than 150% of the federal poverty guidelines, or \$41,625 for a family of four.

Proposed Expenditures

Connecticut's final allocation in regular SSBG funds for FFY 2022 was \$17.4 million. The SSBG federal funding level for FFY 2023 has not yet been determined. For purposes of the development of this plan, we have estimated that the federal allocation for FFY 2023 will be level-funded from FFY 2022.

Pending the release of the federal budget, this plan estimates total SSBG funding of \$23.1 million will be available for FFY 2023. This figure reflects projected block grant funding of \$17.4 million and estimated carryforward funding of \$5.7 million. The available FFY 2022 carryforward will be spent for FFY 2023 expenditures before utilizing the anticipated FFY 2023 block grant funding. Table A on page 9 of the plan highlights FFY 2021 expenditures, FFY 2022 estimated expenditures and FFY 2023 proposed expenditures, as well as the percentage change from FFY 2022 to FFY 2023.

The allocation plan also includes the distribution of SSBG funds to other state agencies as follows: the Department of Aging and Disability Services, the Department of Housing, the Department of Labor, and the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. Contracts for the provision of these services are subject to the competitive procurement provisions of Connecticut General Statutes §§ 4-212 to 4-219 and each individual state agency adheres to its procurement plan, submitted to and approved by the Office of Policy and Management. Each state agency establishes its own allocation process for support of SSBG services under its auspices. In addition, the Department also allocates SSBG funds through direct contracts or sub-contractor agreements to approximately 31 private non-profit providers.

The FFY 2023 allocation plan includes the following proposed allocation changes:

Family Planning Services: The FFY 2023 plan removes the one-time funding increase of \$100,000 that was included in the FFY 2022 allocation plan and returns funding for the family planning service category to the FFY 2019 level of \$889,152 (pre-pandemic levels).

Home-Based Services: The FFY 2023 plan proposes to allocate funding of \$1,742,427 in support of the current program participant activity and expenditure trend. While this represents a decrease of \$355,338 from the FFY 2022 proposed allocation level of \$2,097,765, it reflects an increase of \$16,413 over FFY 2022 estimated expenditures; this category has, over the most recent fiscal years, experienced significant underspending, adding to the carryforward balance. The FFY 2023 plan proposes to reallocate \$150,000 of the \$355,338 identified above to support home delivered meals.

Home Delivered Meals: The FFY 2023 proposed allocation of \$982,601 includes a temporary increase of \$150,000 over the FFY 2022 allocation of \$832,601. This increase is intended to offset the increased cost of food due to inflationary pressures.

Other Services: The FFY 2023 proposed allocation of \$1,287,959 includes \$270,728 for two positions to support program application and payment processing in DSS' home-based services and protective services for adults programs. (Due to a delay in the hiring process, the FFY 2022 estimate of \$65,390 reflects the anticipated cost of these new hires for the quarter ending September 30, 2022.)

The proposed FFY 2023 funding levels for all other line items are not anticipated to result in an expansion or reduction of services and are identical to the funding levels proposed and adopted in the FFY 2022 plan.

We join the Governor and the Office of Policy and Management in recommending approval of the Social Services Block Grant allocation plan for federal fiscal year 2023. Thank you for your review and attention in this matter.