

Good Morning Chairmen Martin, Freeman, Kearney and Moul and all members of the House and Senate Local Government Committee. It is my pleasure to come before you this morning to speak to you about Pennsylvania's community action agencies funded through the Community Services Block Grant, a federal program created in 1964 during the Johnson era War on Poverty.

My name is Susan Moore. I am the Chief Executive Officer of the Community Action Association of Pennsylvania, better known as CAAP, a 55 year old membership organization comprised of the Commonwealth's community action agencies. CAAP's mission is to strengthen, advocate for, and empower the state network of Community Action Agencies to effectively address issues of poverty.

One of the best ways to strengthen and empower organizations is through education, training and technical assistance. CAAP offers robust educational opportunities. For instance, in the Spring of each year, the Association presents a Symposium to which the leadership of each member agency is invited. For three days, up to five leaders from each agency, including governing board members, step back from their daily responsibilities and come together to immerse themselves in subjects that will give them an opportunity to look at relevant issues from a fresh perspective. In the past few years, our Symposia have focused on a variety of topics such as racial disparity, organizational development, and transformational leadership.

Every autumn, the Association holds its Annual Conference to which agency staff members from all levels come together to sharpen skills, learn new techniques, share best practices and network with one another. Roundtables for specific groups, such as finance, human resource, development and work ready are held so that like staff can share and learn from one another.

For the past 22 years, one of the highlights of the Conference has been CAAP's Annual Self Sufficiency Awards ceremony at which we honor both those who have made significant progress towards self-sufficiency, but still receive some private or public aid such as child care assistance; and those who have achieved complete self-sufficiency. Self-Sufficiency is a very personal journey. At some point in these award winners' lives, they have faced one or more of the life challenges that keep so many people in poverty, unable to become the fully realized individuals they want to be. They know first-hand the determination, the strength, the humility, and the strong personal and community support network it takes to surpass these challenges. For 55 years, Community Action Agencies and programs have been there to support those needing a hand up.

Our agencies are required by federal legislation to be locally governed by a tri-partite board in order to be responsive to the needs of the communities they serve. Tri-partite boards are made up equally of elected officials, members of the business community and clients of the agency. CAAP focuses training efforts on strengthening these boards, recognizing that successful and responsive agencies must be overseen by boards that understand and actively support the agency's mission.

CAAP staff train agency boards regularly with a focus on board responsibilities both as individual members and the board as a whole, fund raising, community relations, supervision of agency leadership, fiscal oversight and fundraising, client satisfaction and program development to mention a few.

In addition to governance training, CAAP also trains Boards and agency staff on ROMA - Results-Oriented Management and Accountability – a comprehensive performance management system, used exclusively by the local and national community action network, that incorporates the use of outcomes/results into the administration, management, operation and evaluation of human service programs.

Community action agencies, while offering a wide variety of programs as you can see in the 2018 CAAP Service Matrix I have provided you, are primarily community catalytic change agents. Based on comprehensive community needs assessments performed every three years by each agency, an agency can determine what needs exist in its community, what resources are there to meet these needs and what needs are not being addressed and why. In their role as catalyst, Pennsylvania's community action agencies are often on the cutting edge: finding ways to change the community conversation about poverty; finding new ways of thinking about poverty; finding new ways of addressing poverty. Let me offer four concrete examples of this honed leadership:

- South Central Community Action Agency, in Adams and Franklin Counties, is partnering with the local hospital to create together a case management program that focuses on the social determinants of health (SDOH). Realizing that social issues, such as homelessness, joblessness, lack of transportation, etc. play a huge role in determining the health outcome for patients, the hospital and community action agency are working together to blend what each does best – the hospital addresses the physical needs of the patient while the community action agency addresses the social needs of the patient.
- Three quarters of the 43 Pennsylvania community action agencies operate a weatherization program in the Commonwealth. We celebrate National Weatherization day every year on October 30<sup>th</sup>. During the past 43 years, our agencies have weatherized more than 540,500 homes and resolved over 137,000 heating crisis emergencies in the Commonwealth.
- Blueprints, in Greene and Washington Counties, is addressing poverty by taking a two generational approach. When a client comes into the agency seeking services, for example assistance with housing, the client's entire social system is evaluated. Are there other family members needing assistance? Are there other services needed besides housing? By addressing

the whole family's needs and making educational tools available, it has been demonstrated that poverty in that family can be ended.

- Mobility LABs is a strategic collaboration of donors who have created a pioneering, four-year initiative to spur the development of new solutions to sustainably lift families out of poverty, and to promote dynamic leaders who will aim to change the national conversation around social and economic mobility.

Mobility LABs has identified 5 innovative new models from communities across the country that can be replicated.

- New York City (Brownsville, South Bronx, and Flushing)
- Baltimore
- Northeast Pennsylvania
- Suburban Chicago (Cook County)
- The Bay Area (east Contra Costa County, the Bayview, and east San Jose)

The Commission on Economic Opportunity, the community action agency for Luzerne county, was selected to serve as the local anchor partner for Northeast Pennsylvania. During the planning grant period, local partners will use both relevant data and a human-centered design process that takes into consideration local community and resident input. Data analysis is expected to address gaps in mobility from poverty (e.g., among different demographic groups within geographic areas) and “loss points” (i.e., points during the life cycle where low-income children and youth and their households are experiencing obstacles to mobility) specific to their local contexts.

Local partners will compile and use their findings to make recommendations about approaches that can be implemented and tested in the local community to support sustainable mobility from poverty. The recommendations made by local anchor partners at the end of the 9-month planning period will be

considered during the process of awarding implementation grants. Implementation grants will be used to develop and test pilot programs during the three years that follow the current planning phase.

As a catalyst, the local community action agency brings helping organizations, businesses, educational institutions to the community table to figure out how, together, they can address the unmet needs. This collaborative effort is critical to improving communities, enhancing work and lifestyle opportunities for residents, and helping to increase mobility from poverty.

Just as its member agencies collaborate, forming partnerships on the local level, CAAP also collaborates with other statewide organizations who share complementary missions and interests. Importantly, CAAP works closely with the PA Department of Community and Economic Development, Center for Community Services, to ensure that agencies receive the training and technical assistance they require to remain strong, relevant and responsive to their local communities.

Thank you for your time today.

*Testimony provided to the House and Senate Local Government Committee, October 28, 2019. Presented by Susan Moore, CEO, Community Action association of Pennsylvania*