

**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR STATE COMMUNITY SERVICES PROGRAMS**  
Testimony related to the  
**U. S. Department of Health and Human Services**  
Submitted to the  
**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON LABOR,  
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, EDUCATION AND RELATED AGENCIES**  
April 8, 2004

The National Association for State Community Services Programs (NASCSPP) thanks this committee for its continued support of the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG), and seeks an appropriation of \$650 million for the state grant portion of the CSBG, the same as its FY 2004 appropriation. We are requesting flat funding this year in order to continue the efforts of the Community Services Network in assisting those families remaining on welfare with the intensive services they need to transition to work and to assist low-income workers in remaining at work through supportive services such as transportation and child care. These funds will also continue to assist states in developing services in the four percent of counties that are not currently served by the CSBG.

The FY 2004 appropriation of CSBG included language regarding the use of the block grant at the state level. Many of the states have statutes regarding the use of CSBG funds, which are state legislated. Passing national legislation which contradicts the authorization language regarding the distribution of funds preempts the prerogative of states. NASCSPP urges the committee to discourage the incorporation of authorization language in the appropriations act.

NASCSPP is the national association that represents state administrators of the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG), and state directors of the Department of Energy's Low-Income Weatherization Assistance Program.

### BACKGROUND

The states believe the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) is a unique block grant that has successfully devolved decision making to the local level. Federally funded with oversight at the state level, the CSBG has maintained a local network of over 1,120 agencies which coordinate nearly \$9.8 billion in federal, state, local and private resources each year. Operating in more than 96% of counties in the nation and serving nearly 13 million low-income persons, local agencies, known as Community Action Agencies (CAAs), provide services based on the characteristics of poverty in their communities. For one town, this might mean providing job placement and retention services; for another, developing affordable housing; in rural areas it might mean providing access to health services or developing a rural transportation system.

Since its inception, the CSBG has shown how partnerships between states and local agencies benefit citizens in each state. We believe it should be looked to as a model of how the federal government can best promote self-sufficiency for low-income persons in a flexible, decentralized, non-bureaucratic and accountable way.

Long before the creation of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant, the CSBG was setting the standard for private-public partnerships that could work to the betterment of local communities and low-income residents. Family oriented, while promoting economic development and individual self-sufficiency, the CSBG relies on an existing and experienced community-based service delivery system of CAAs and other non-profit organizations to produce results for its clients.

## MAJOR CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COMMUNITY SERVICES NETWORK

**LEVERAGING CAPACITY:** For every CSBG dollar they receive, CAAs leverage \$4.63 in non-federal resources (state, local, and private) to coordinate efforts that improve the self-sufficiency of low-income persons and lead to the development of thriving communities.

**VOLUNTEER MOBILIZATION:** CAAs mobilize volunteers in large numbers. In FY 2002, the most recent year for which data are available, the CAAs elicited more than 40 million hours of volunteer efforts, the equivalent of almost 18,250 full-time employees. Using just the minimum wage, these volunteer hours are valued at nearly \$205 million.

**LOCALLY DIRECTED:** Tri-partite boards of directors guide CAAs. These boards consist of one-third elected officials, one-third low-income persons and one-third representatives from the private sector. The boards are responsible for establishing policy and approving business plans of the local agencies. Since these boards represent a cross-section of the local community, they guarantee that CAAs will be responsive to the needs of their community.

**ADAPTABILITY:** CAAs provide a flexible local presence that governors have mobilized to deal with emerging poverty issues.

**EMERGENCY RESPONSE:** CAAs are utilized by federal and state emergency personnel as a frontline resource to deal with emergency situations such as floods, hurricanes and economic downturns. They are also relied on by citizens in their community to deal with individual family hardships, such as house fires or other emergencies.

**ACCOUNTABLE:** The federal Office of Community Services, state CSBG offices and CAAs have worked closely to develop a results-oriented management and accountability (ROMA) system. Through this system, individual agencies determine local priorities within six common national goals for CSBG and report on the outcomes that they achieved in their communities.

The statutory goal of the CSBG is to ameliorate the effects of poverty while at the same time working within the community to eliminate the causes of poverty. The primary goal of every CAA is self-sufficiency for its clients. Helping families become self-sufficient is a long-term process that requires multiple resources. This is why the partnership of federal, state, local and private enterprise has been so vital to the successes of the CAAs.

### WHO DOES THE CSBG SERVE?

National data compiled by NASCSP show that the CSBG serves a broad segment of low-income persons, particularly those who are not being reached by other programs and are not being served by welfare programs. Based on the most recently reported data, from fiscal year 2002:

- ◆ 87% have incomes at or below the poverty level; 22% have incomes at or below 50% of the poverty guidelines. In 2002, the poverty level for a family of three was \$15,020.
- ◆ Only 53% of adults have a high school diploma or equivalency certificate.
- ◆ 40% of all client families are “working poor” and have wages or unemployment benefits as income.
- ◆ 17% depend on pensions and Social Security and are therefore poor, former workers.

- ◆ Over 470,000 families are TANF participants, 23% of the average monthly TANF caseload
- ◆ Nearly 60% of families assisted have children under 18 years of age.

### WHAT DO LOCAL CSBG AGENCIES DO?

Since Community Action Agencies operate in rural areas as well as in urban areas, it is difficult to describe a typical Community Action Agency. However, one thing that is common to all is the goal of self-sufficiency for all of their clients. Reaching this goal may mean providing daycare for a struggling single mother as she completes her General Equivalency Diploma (GED) certificate, moves through a community college course and finally is on her own supporting her family without federal assistance. It may mean assisting a recovering substance abuser as he seeks employment. Many of the Community Action Agencies' clients are persons who are experiencing a one-time emergency. Others have lives of chaos brought about by many overlapping forces - a divorce, sudden death of a wage earner, illness, lack of a high school education, closing of a local factory or the loss of family farms.

CAAs provide access to a variety of opportunities for their clients. Although they are not identical, most will provide some if not all of the services listed below:

- |                                                                |                                                     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| ◆ employment and training programs                             | ◆ local community and economic development projects |
| ◆ transportation and child care for low-income workers         | ◆ housing and weatherization services               |
| ◆ individual development accounts                              | ◆ Head Start                                        |
| ◆ micro business development help for low-income entrepreneurs | ◆ energy assistance programs                        |
| ◆ a variety of crisis and emergency safety net services        | ◆ nutrition programs                                |
|                                                                | ◆ family development programs                       |
|                                                                | ◆ senior services                                   |

CSBG funds many of these services directly. Even more importantly, CSBG is the core funding which holds together a local delivery system able to respond effectively and efficiently, without a lot of red tape, to the needs of individual low-income households as well as to broader community needs. Without the CSBG, local agencies would not have the capacity to work in their communities developing local funding, private donations and volunteer services and running programs of far greater size and value than the actual CSBG dollars they receive.

CAAs manage a host of other federal, state and local programs which makes it possible to provide a one-stop location for persons whose problems are usually multi-faceted. Sixty percent (60) of the CAAs manage the Head Start program in their community. Using their unique position in the community, CAAs recruit additional volunteers, bring in local school department personnel, tap into religious groups for additional help, coordinate child care and bring needed health care services to Head Start centers. In many states they also manage the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), raising additional funds from utilities for this vital program. CAAs may also administer the Weatherization Assistance Program and are able to mobilize funds for additional work on residences not directly related to energy savings that may keep a low-income elderly couple in their home. CAAs also coordinate the Weatherization Assistance Program with the Community Development Block Grant program to stretch federal dollars and provide a greater return for tax dollars invested. They also administer the Women,

Infants and Children (WIC) nutrition program as well as job training programs, substance abuse programs, transportation programs, domestic violence and homeless shelters, as well as food pantries.

### EXAMPLES OF CSBG AT WORK

Since 1994, CSBG has implemented Results-Oriented Management and Accountability practices whereby the effectiveness of programs is captured through the use of goals and outcomes measures. Below you will find the network's first nationally aggregated outcomes achieved by individuals, families and communities as a result of their participation in innovative CSBG programs during FY 2002:

- ◆ 70,683 participants gained employment with the help of community action (42 states reporting)
- ◆ 24,393 participants retained employment for 90 days or more (25 states reporting)
- ◆ 48,558 households experienced an increase in annual income as a result of earnings (32 states reporting)
- ◆ 122,706 families experienced improved housing as a result of community action assistance, including reduced homelessness, access to safe and affordable housing, and home ownership (42 states reporting)
- ◆ continued to move from homelessness to transitional housing (23 states reporting)
- ◆ 33,795 families moved from substandard to safe, stable housing (26 states reporting)
- ◆ 1,861 families achieved home ownership as a result of community action assistance (16 states reporting)
- ◆ 109,127 participants successfully completed education (i.e. GED, high school or higher education) or job training as a result of community action (38 states reporting)
- ◆ 672,283 new service "opportunities" were created for low-income families as a result of community action work or advocacy, including affordable and expanded public and private transportation, medical care, child care and development, new community centers, youth programs, increased business opportunity, food, and retail shopping in low-income neighborhoods (28 states reporting)

All the above considered, NASCSP urges this committee to maintain funding the CSBG grant to the states at \$650 million.