

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

[[DATE]]

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
Chair
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
141 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20501

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
172 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20501

Dear Chair Baldwin and Ranking Member Capito:

As the Subcommittee begins the challenging task of preparing the FY2025 appropriations bill, we respectfully request that you support funding of \$800 million for the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG). CSBG provides core funding for the nationwide network of more than 1,000 local Community Action Agencies (CAAs). This modest increase from current levels is critical to enable these agencies to sustain their vitally important work for America's low-income families. We also request that you include language in the FY2025 bill that continues the essential current policy of allowing CAAs to serve households with incomes of up to 200% of the poverty line.

Located in virtually every American county, these primarily nonprofit agencies are an integral part of local efforts to reduce poverty, help people become self-sufficient, and revitalize communities. Moreover, the Community Action network stands ready to give immediate help whenever a crisis or unforeseen event upends the lives of low-income people and communities.

For 60 years, Community Action Agencies have worked to address the causes and conditions of poverty by administering a full range of comprehensive, coordinated programs. These agencies serve an estimated 10 million low-income people each year, in 5 million families, helping them gain useful skills, access new opportunities and achieve financial independence. CAAs provide a critical "first step" for those in need and help our constituents navigate resources in the broader community, including intervention for homeless veterans, emergency food assistance, and job training. CAAs serve our seniors and residents living with disabilities by connecting them to services that allow them to maintain their independence. They see and respond to emerging needs, such as the opioid crisis and the devastating impact of fentanyl on overdose rates in our communities.

As a uniquely flexible source of funds, CSBG allows CAAs to address their community needs through building partnerships and investing in the creation of opportunities especially suited to local conditions and the unique circumstances of low-income residents. Moreover, CSBG funds assist CAAs in attracting non-federal resources; for every \$1 of federal CSBG funding, CAAs are able to leverage nearly \$5 from state, local, and private sources.

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In 2020, Congress recognized the need to increase CSBG eligibility criteria from 100% (or 125% at state option) to 200% of poverty, and has continued this policy in all subsequent appropriations laws. This increased eligibility has enabled CAAs to stabilize fragile families, mitigate the impact of arbitrary benefit cliffs, and help households in crisis avoid a permanent fall into poverty. Almost all states have adopted this eligibility level and we urge you to maintain language in the FY2025 appropriations law to continue this policy, made even more necessary by the ongoing impact of inflation.

Recognizing the challenges facing the Subcommittee this budget year, we submit this modest request to fund CSBG at \$800 million and to continue eligibility at 200% of poverty. Your support and faith in the work of Community Action, made possible by flexible CSBG funds, has helped change the lives of millions of families in thousands of American communities. We thank you for your leadership and consideration of this request on behalf of the Community Services Block Grant.

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