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Legislative Hearing

Proposed State Application and Plan for the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) Program for FFY 2024 and FFY 2025 September 13, 2024

Submitted by Renee M. Hungerford, Executive Director/CEO,
Community Action of Orleans and Genesee

Introduction

My name is Renee Hungerford, and I am the Executive Director/CEO of Community Action of Orleans and Genesee. I appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback on the Department of State, Division of Community Services 2024 & 2025 CSBG State Application and Plan and the work of Community Action Agencies (CAA) across the state.

Our agency has the mission of helping people to become self-sufficient and overcome the impact of poverty. We serve Orleans and Genesee Counties as well as some of Niagara County. We assist over 4,000 individuals each year offering a broad range of services ranging from emergency services to programs that assist people in gaining employment, work experience, or graduating from high school. Our staff of over one hundred are committed to serving our communities and making a difference in people's lives. We do important things with extremely limited resources and without CSBG funding, we simply could not exist. This would leave a substantial burden on the Department of Social Services while abandoning the needs of a very vulnerable population. Without our agency, the community would also lose the vital services we provide from other funding sources like Head Start, Weatherization, High School Credit Recovery, Child Care Resource and Referral and many more.

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The Value of CSBG Funding

Community Action of Orleans and Genesee utilizes CSBG funding to employ staff that provide critical case management and emergency services. Funds are also used to help customers avoid eviction, get to necessary medical appointments, purchase school supplies, or nourish families. Finally, CSBG funding is paramount to ensure that staff receives training and can utilize the necessary technology to report outcomes and continually improve. As New York State minimum wage increases, it has become continually more challenging to retain staff as we are not able to pay competitive wages. This is exacerbated when other programs, like Head Start, enjoy COLA increases. Our agency is grateful to occasionally also receive CSBG discretionary funding, however given the effort we put into our Community Needs Assessment, we would be grateful to have more discretion as to how funds are spent. We know our communities and what needs are greatest.

Lastly, implementation of the Governor's **Minority and Women-owned Business Enterprise (MWBE) initiative**, although supported, is incredibly challenging for our agency given we are situated in a rural area with few MWBE businesses. We would appreciate this requirement being relaxed so we do not spend precious resources to demonstrate that we have taken time to try to secure bids from companies that would not do business with us due to distant location.

Thank you for taking the time to hear our comments and recommendations.

Renee M. Hungerford
Executive Director/CEO