

Comments regarding the 2024-2025 CSBG State Plan

Submitted by: Denis E. Wilson, Sr.

Fulmont Community Action Agency, Inc.

P.O. Box 835, Fonda, New York 12068

518-853-3011

capdirector@yahoo.com

Good morning.

My name is Denis Wilson. I have worked with the Department of State for over twenty-eight years as the Executive Director of Fulmont Community Action Agency, Inc.

I am happy to comment on the 2024-2025 CSBG State Plan. Our agency holds the Department of State and its staff in the highest regard.

Fulmont is the local provider of the WIC, Weatherization, Fulton County Senior Transportation, Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) and Head Start Programs. We operate three Community Services Outreach Centers, which are supported with CSBG funds across two counties (Fulton & Montgomery), in addition to our administrative office in Fonda, NY, where eligible families and individuals can receive emergency services such as food pantries and utility or rental assistance, as well as family support such as Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA), Family Development and Employment Support.

I would like to begin by thanking Secretary of State, Walter T. Mosley and Deputy Secretary of State for Economic Opportunity, Zoila DelCastillo for their leadership and support. I would also like to thank Manuel A. Rosa, Director, New York State Department of State, Division of Community Services, for his commitment to the agencies under his purview. He is recognized state-wide for his strong support of the New York State Community Action Network. And finally, I would also like to recognize the importance of the roles of Program Analyst, Aimee Kollar, and Senior Accountant, Craig Howard. Their interactions with our agency have proven to be invaluable.

I would also like to recognize the great work of New York State Community Action Association (NYSCAA), of which I am a Board member. Their support through training, advocacy and education is invaluable.

Fulmont serves the economically disadvantaged in Fulton, Montgomery, and surrounding counties in New York State. Fulton and Montgomery Counties have very high rates of poverty. The funding we receive through the Community Services Block Grant is utilized to provide direct, poverty-reducing services to help stabilize our consumers' lives and assist them in becoming self-sufficient.

Community Action Programs are the front line in the War Against Poverty. Our use of Results-Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA) and our holistic, strengths-based approach to serving our consumers has proven effective time and again. CSBG legislation requires the inclusion of low income participants on our Board of Directors, and, therefore, in every step of our planning, implementation, and reporting process. CAPs offer a unique voice in government and policy making, and our outcomes speak for themselves.

I have found that the regional meetings conducted by the New York State Community Action Association (NYSCAA) and the Department of State have proven to be a valuable forum for the dissemination of information provided by the Department of State and also for the exchange of information among agencies.

Utilizing monitoring visits and guidance on standards through the Annual Compliance Review of Operational Standards (ACROS) and the Triennial Review for Accountability and Compliance with Standards (TRACS), the Department of State's programmatic and fiscal staff has been incredibly efficient in ensuring that we are kept up-to-date on all changes and that we maintain the highest standards in everything we do. I feel that Fulmont continually demonstrates accountability and wise use of government funds. We do agree with the reduction of on site monitoring visits and the substitution of desk reviews for high-performing agencies outlined in the State Plan. This will free up DOS staff to focus on agencies that may require more technical assistance. Due to the fact that the State Triennial Accountability Review (STAR), which will replace the Triennial Review for Accountability and Compliance with Standards (TRACS), has not been made available yet, we are unable to make any comment.

We recommend and agree that the allocation of discretionary funds available should be distributed among the 47 eligible CAP's to address local initiatives to enhance current programs or to fill service gaps using innovative strategies to meet community needs.

The Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) income guidelines are too restrictive at 125% of Federal Poverty guidelines, which excludes many families, and should be remain at 200% of the Federal Poverty guidelines.

Implementation of the Governor's **Minority and Women-owned Business Enterprise (MWBE) initiative**, which NYSCAA and its member agencies support, continues to challenge CAAs. Particularly in upstate communities where the MWBE requirements make it difficult to find local vendors, agencies are frequently forced to purchase services outside of their communities and forgo using local vendors, which have been long-term supporters of the agencies. Therefore, we recommend looking at the requirements around engaging MWBE vendors to streamline the process.

The funding allocated through the Community Services Block Grant and distributed to Community Action Programs has remained flat for many years. This makes maintaining program operations extremely difficult. The cost of operations has gone up steadily with no significant increase in funding. Although the Department of State and the current State Legislature have no control over the amount that is allocated to the CSBG programs, we would hope that State officials would advocate to their Federal counterparts to increase funding in order to properly maintain program operations that provide services to the low-income and elderly in their respective communities.

In closing, we would like to reiterate our agency's satisfaction with the consistently high level of leadership demonstrated by the Department of State. We can't express the value of the regular monitoring visits by field representatives and the role of the new assessments in helping Fulmont to maintain compliance in an organized and timely fashion. We appreciate the continual guidance provided by the Department of State, and we look forward to maintaining a mutually beneficial relationship in the years to come. Thank you.