



**Oral Statement**

**Testimony of David Bradley, Executive Director, National Community Action Foundation**

**Before the United States House of Representatives**

**Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies**

**Committee on Appropriations**

**March 29, 2012**

Chairman Rehberg, Ranking Member DeLauro, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding the FY2013 Health and Human Services (HHS) Budget and specifically the Community Services Block Grant or CSBG. I represent the National Community Action Foundation (NCAF) which serves as an advocate for local Community Action Agencies or CAAs. These agencies served 15 million low-income people in 2010 and continue to promote community economic opportunities, and support low-wage working families and retirees to become more economically secure.

First, I would like to thank the Subcommittee for your remarkable efforts to sustain CSBG at the previous year's levels in FY2012. Our entire network – as well as communities nationwide – will not forget that you sustained this program in a difficult year. Thanks to your help, CAAs throughout the country are continuing to operate. The Northwest Montana Community Action Partnership, for example, would have had to close four outreach centers in Polson, Libby, Eureka and Thompson if Administration's proposed cut had been enacted. You provided access to important services for families in even the most remote areas.

I also would like to thank you for your courage to fund LIHEAP at \$909 million above the President's request and for your decision to fund Head Start programs an impressive \$424 million above FY2011 levels. This is making a huge difference in the lives of many low-income children and families.

The Administration's proposal for FY2013– to cut CSBG in half and transform it into a competitive program – contradicts the reason for supporting locally-driven community decisions, which is the core of the CSBG mission. Under the Administration's proposal there isn't one community in the country that would be guaranteed funding and it is realistic to say that more than 50 percent, of Community Action Agencies would be denied funding, especially those in rural areas. CAAs are governed by tripartite boards composed of the stakeholders from three sectors of the community who ensure that the resources provided are accountable to those communities. These are not Washington bureaucrats, but representatives from local business, elected officials and members of the low-income community.

An allocation of \$700 million, the 2010 level, for CSBG is essential for meeting local needs. You will see from my written statement, how CSBG dollars provide innovative, essential services that help communities throughout the country. CAAs use CSBG funding to provide innovative and coordinated services to help low-income families obtain fiscal stability and long-term financial security. From a mobile health unit in Weatherford, Texas, to a free community pharmacy in Kentucky to coordinating disaster relief efforts after the tornado in Joplin, Missouri CSBG dollars are changing lives and communities nationwide. It is also important to mention that CAAs account meticulously for every dollar that is spent and have a thorough results-management system.

CSBG programs are locally designed for each community, and therefore they are not easy to summarize. To illustrate the importance of CSBG to communities, I would like to highlight the story of a Navy veteran in East Hartford, Connecticut, who when times got tough was able to turn to his local CAA to help get him back on his feet.

“Steven” is a decorated Navy Veteran who figured he would never need to ask for assistance. A series of events beyond his control brought him to the Community Renewal Team in 2010. He was superintendent of a condo complex when an on-the-job injury left him permanently disabled. His housing was part of his compensation package, so he lost his condo when he lost his job. For 18 months,

he bounced between his truck and his friends' couches, trying to stretch his Workers' Compensation to cover his debts and provide for his daughter.

Then he heard about CRT's Veterans Crossing, a new transitional residence for homeless vets in East Hartford, which offers intensive case management and a wide array of support services. While there, Steven reconnected with a long-held goal: getting an education and giving back to the community. He has already completed a medical training program, and is working on his Bachelor of Science / Registered Nursing degree. He won and completed an internship in the Emergency Room at the Veterans Affairs (VA) Connecticut Health Care campus in Newington. Steven and his daughter recently moved into an apartment near the VA campus, where he hopes to be working for years to come.

Steven's story is a clear example of why CSBG is so important and unique. During the CSBG-mandated community needs assessment, CRT leaders identified growing homelessness and incarceration among veterans as a new urgent local issue. Their CSBG –funded managers organized partners and, together, identified funders and investors to build the transitional facility and link medical and educational services to its residents. CSBG now funds staff specialists who provide advice and coordinate supports that Steven relies on as he gets back on a new track. Community Action Agencies often serve as a trampoline, so that when incomes drop and insecurity rises, they are there to help people bounce back. Steven, like so many other participants in CSBG activities is moving from a life of dependency to one of self-sufficiency.

I would like to encourage the Committee to provide \$700 million for CSBG and continue to reject the 50 percent cut to the Community Services Block Grant that the President has proposed. By cutting CSBG funding by 50 percent, hundreds of counties throughout the country will lose these important services, and millions of low-income individuals will be forced to turn to state and local governments, which are already financially stressed. As you make funding decisions for FY2013, I urge you to ask yourself: "In which areas of your district do you think struggling families should not have

access to Community Action services? Which half of the low-income population in your district would you force to turn to state and local bureaucracies instead of their local community's CAA? Which community partnerships are not necessary?" Consider how often your district staff turns to Community Action Agencies to help your constituents. Please ensure that this lifeline remains available to your local communities and thank you for this opportunity to be here today.