



ASSOCIATION OF
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Public Hearing Comment

August 20, 2015

Ohio Community Services Block Grant Federal Fiscal Year 2016 - 2017 State Plan

Good afternoon, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony and comments on Ohio's Federal Fiscal Years 2016-2017 Community Services Block Grant Plan.

My name is Lisa Hamler-Fugitt. I serve as the Executive Director for the Ohio Association of Foodbanks, Ohio's largest charitable response to hunger. The association also is the home of The Ohio Benefit Bank™ (OBB™) and serves as the lead organization for the federal Navigator grant from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, connecting Ohioans to health insurance through the federally-facilitated Health Insurance Marketplace.

Our association applauds and commends the management, staff and leadership of the Ohio Development Services Agency, Community Services Division, Office of Community Assistance and Ohio's Community Action Agencies for their partnership and efforts to help remove obstacles and provide vital basic services to combat poverty and hunger in communities across Ohio.

The Ohio Association of Foodbanks and its 12 member Feeding America foodbanks distributed more than 186 million pounds of food and grocery items in state fiscal year 2014 to over 3,300 member charities including food pantries, soup kitchens and homeless shelters. Ohio's Community Action Agencies are vital partners in our efforts statewide. Our statewide hunger relief network served more than two million hungry Ohioans last year and the volunteer-driven, charitable network that is struggling to meet the rising demand since the Great Recession swept through Ohio communities. Hunger in Ohio has risen 40 percent from 2010 to 2014.

The funding provided by the State of Ohio through the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) to support emergency and nutrition services is critically needed to help address the growing hunger crisis. We urge the State of Ohio to maintain and strengthen this support to help counteract the conditions of hunger and malnutrition among low-income individuals and families.

Section 14.3 Service Delivery, Coordination and Innovation Ohio Benefit Bank (OBB) Partnership with the Office of Community Assistance

The Ohio Benefit Bank is a technology platform that provides community and faith-based organizations who serve low-income Ohioans with direct access to over 23 work support programs and tax credits.

These programs help Ohioans stabilize themselves and begin the process of moving towards economic self-sufficiency. Since its inception in 2006 The Ohio Benefit Bank has trained nearly 6,000 counselors at over 1,300 organizations to provide services to more than 500,000 households helping them access over \$1.3 billion in tax credits and work support programs. The Ohio Development Services Agency, Office of Community Assistance and Ohio's Community Action Agencies were early supporters and adopters of the Ohio Benefit Bank and have been instrumental in helping to grow the OBB. The OBB is now the largest application assistance program operating in the United States. The program encourages economic self-sufficiency by helping low-income Ohio's to gain access to programs that encourage and support education, training and work. The Ohio Benefit Bank provides the technology that engages community and faith based organization such as CSBG grantees in helping their neighbors reaching them where they live, work, play, pray, and learn.

2015 Highlights of Accomplishments Service Delivery, Coordination and Innovation

The association thanks and commends the Community Services Block Grantees who have integrated the Benefit Bank tool into their emergency assistance and self-sufficiency program operations. Ohio CAAs operated counselor-assisted OBB sites and served as host sites for the newer Benefit Bank self-serve program. In addition during 2015, the association provided 11 CSBG grantee organizations with \$68,500 in grants allowing them to serve and assist 4,510 low-income residents to prepare and file their state and federal tax returns and helping them to claim \$6,619,457 in tax returns, including the Earned Income Tax and Child Tax Credits, a Return on Investment of \$96 dollars to every \$1 invested.

9.3 Eligible Entity Linkages and Coordination

Our association is proud to operate one of the nation's largest state-based national service programs; dedicating 40 full-time VISTA national service members who help build linkages and develop program services to address hunger and poverty in Ohio. The association's national service program are honored to partner with and highly commend the Northwestern Ohio Community Action Commission (NOCAC), Hocking-Athens-Perry Community Action Partnership (HAPCAP), Community Action Council of Portage County and Washington-Morgan Community Action and numerous faith-based and community organizations who provide critical nutrition assistance to hungry Ohioans and increase CAA's capacity to expand coordination, link and leverage community resources in order to carry out and achieve CSBG goals.

14.4 Eligible Entity Emergency Food and Nutrition Services

In partnership with CSBG grantees, the association expanded access to summer meals for low-income children through the Governor's Summer Back Pack and Innovative Weekend Meal Delivery Program by placing 50 part-time AmeriCorps VISTA Summer Associates at sites in Ohio, thanks to support from the Corporation for National and Community Services. The association was honored to partner with eight Community Action Agencies in Ohio including Adams/Brown Counties Economic Opportunities, Inc., COAD, Community Action Committee of Pike County, Hocking-Athens-Perry Community Action Agency, Community Action Program Corporation of Washington/Morgan Counties, Ross County Community Action Commission, Highland County Community Action Organization and Community Action Commission of Scioto County who helped host, operate and distribute over 187,000 summer meals to low-income children as a result of these programs during the summer of 2015.

Concerns

9.4 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Employment and Training Activities

The Ohio Association of Foodbanks is disappointed the state's CSBG plan will not be included as part of the WIOA Combined State Plan as allowed under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). While Ohio's WIOA plan takes some modest strides in coordinating core workforce development programs, the state is missing an opportunity to truly unify the workforce programs by failing to include Ohio's Community Services Block Grantee's, in addition to Ohio's TANF program, Ohio Works First (OWF), and the Food Stamps Employment and Training Program in the statewide plan. This omission disregards both the intent of WIOA and also the economic circumstances and employment barriers which many low-income Ohioan's face.

In closing the Ohio Association of Foodbanks strongly supports and highly recommends the Community Services Block Grant Federal Fiscal Year 2015 - 2016 State Plan as submitted by the Ohio Development Services Agency, Community Services Division, Office of Community Assistance and Ohio's Community Action Agencies

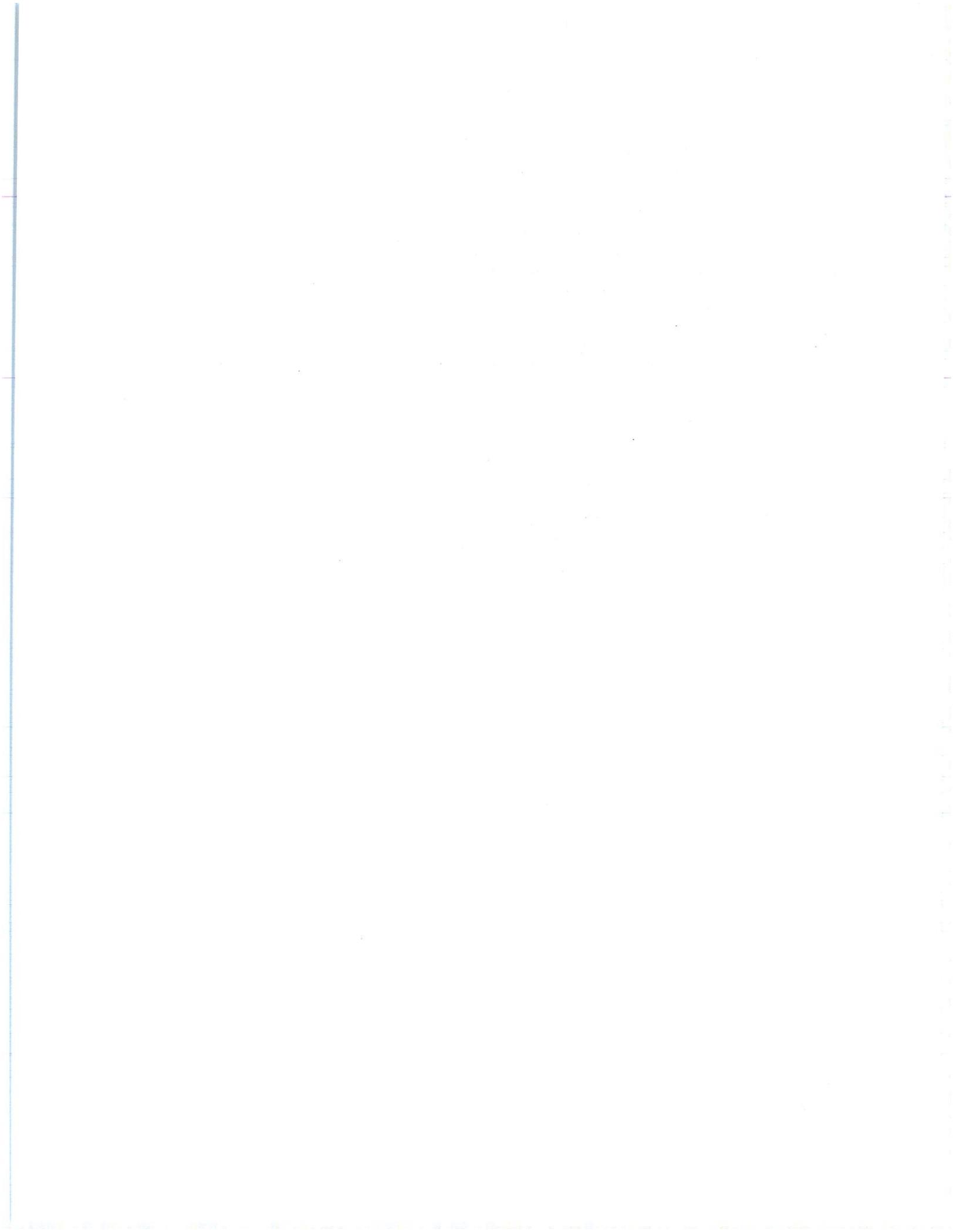
Thank you again for this opportunity to serve on the CSBG Advisory Committee and to provide testimony at today's public hearing. By working together we will strengthen our communities and help our most vulnerable citizen meet their basic needs.

Thank you.

Respectively submitted by,



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Testimony For the Public Hearing on the Community Services Block Grant August 20, 2015

Good afternoon, I am Phil Cole, Executive Director of the Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies. We are an organization that represents Ohio's 50 Community Action Agencies serving every county in the State. Community Action Agencies are the primary providers of services to eliminate poverty and to assist those who suffer its ravages as they work to become self-sufficient.

While the Development Services Agency is not the largest funder of most community action agencies in Ohio, I know that you are familiar with our numbers. I am speaking of the 750,000 individual Ohioans we serve, the 4,500 people we employ and the over half billion dollars we bring to Ohio's economy each year.

I am here to testify about the Community Services Block Grant State Plan for Federal Fiscal Year 2016 as proposed by the Ohio Development Services Agency, Community Services Division, Office of Community Assistance. I want to extend my appreciation to Sadicka White, Karen Fabiano, Randy Hunt and Melissa Stanford for the time they put into this Plan.

While the approximately twenty six million dollars of the program is small in comparison to the total funding received by community action agencies, it is the core that makes most other work possible. The Plan offers a description of the effects of the CSBG program, the leveraging of these funds by agencies, and its wise use in Ohio's communities.

We would recommend three suggestions for this Plan and future plans. First, is to go back to working with the network in the development of the Plan. Congress expects it. The Ohio Network would like it. The plan would be seriously strengthened if we returned to the days where our input was requested, honored and included as we worked together on a plan for the agencies in Ohio.

Second, this is the first year that the CSBG Advisory Committee was not asked to approve the Plan. Approval by the Advisory Committee is always a good demonstration of partnership between the Network of agencies, the State and the Association. This Administration says it wants a partnership, and I believe it truly does, but to the Network the concept of "partnership" seems to be slipping further away.



I hope that DSA will understand our belief that “partnership” means working together before decisions are made. That leads to better understanding and better outcomes. Neither the State nor the Network has all the solutions or is correct all the time. But by working together we can arrive at the correct solutions more often than not. It is the responsibility of the local corporations which are community action agencies to deal with their local poverty issues. It is the responsibility of the State to ensure agencies spend the money legally and follow all laws.

Third, the Plan was not presented to a committee of the General Assembly for discussion as is called for in both federal law and state statute. I know that this has been a challenge over the last several years and the State has done the best it can to meet this requirement. However, the Ohio House of Representatives Committee on Community and Family Development was created to discuss poverty problems and propose poverty solutions.

They hold issues hearings and I am sure Chairman Tim Derickson would be willing to hold a hearing on the CSBG State Plan as he is very familiar with the work of Community Action. I hope the annual presentation called for will be done by presenting what is required in sec. 122.702 ORC, which states:

The general assembly shall conduct public hearings each year on the proposed use and distribution of community services block grant funds, as required by section 675(b) of the "Community Services Block Grant Act," 95 Stat. 1609, 42 U.S.C. 9904.

“Proposed” use means the DSA is to testify as to what they plan to do with the funds for the next year. Presentation of the State Plan satisfies that requirement. It is always a good idea to keep the General Assembly informed.

Also, the Ohio General Assembly changed the allocation percentages this year to bring DSA practices into alignment with the statute while satisfying the requirements of federal law. Among those changes was a dedication of funding to one or more Ohio nonprofit corporations whose primary mission is to provide training and technical assistance to Ohio’s community action agencies.

The Ohio Community Action Training Organization continues to appreciate the opportunity to use training and technical assistance funds for the benefit of Ohio’s CAA network. As a demonstration of this, we can show outcomes on all our trainings since 2003. We are always searching for new ways to make our efforts for the Network even stronger.

This year, OACAA has been working with the Administration to try to develop a program that will allow for innovation in poverty solutions by Ohio’s community action agencies. The proposal includes using part of the new allocation for this as a competitive bid among agencies, overseen by the Governor’s Office of Workforce Transformation, DSA and JobsOhio.

If the federal reauthorization of CSBG is passed this year, it will most likely include innovation requirements. This proposal should establish Ohio as a leader in this area and perhaps it can be a model for other states. I hope the Office of Community Assistance will work with us on this.



CSBG is a program that works. It is one program which shows strong outcomes. It is one program which shows the successes of leveraging and multiple uses of the same tax dollar. It is one program which shows the successes that occur with the effective use by both the State and local community action agencies. It is a wise use of public resources.

Let's work together to continue to make life better for low-income Ohioans.

Thank you for your time and attention.

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