

Chair Bonamici, Ranking Member Fulcher, Chairman Scott, Ranking Member Foxx, and Members of the House Education and Labor Committee, thank you for holding today's hearing and providing us the opportunity to share the importance and impact of the Community Services Block Grant and why passage of H.R. 5129 is so important to the recovery and well being of our communities. My name is Katherine King Galian. I am joining you this morning from Washington County, Oregon where I have been on staff at Community Action since 2002 and currently serve as the Director of Family and Community Resources overseeing our array of anti-poverty efforts.

Today, I would like to share my perspective on the importance passage of this bill to:

1. Solidify the role of CSBG and increase the investment in this critical program
2. Reinforce the emphasis on strategic planning at the local level
3. Permanently raise the income eligibility to 200% FPL

To start, I would like to tell you a little about my community. We are a county of just over 600,000 people in 726 square miles on the west side of the Portland Metro Area. We are comprised of 12 cities and 7 school districts. (Attached Letter from Washington County Mayors) Our largest city, Hillsboro, is just over 100,000 people and is home to Intel, Genentech, a range of high-tech manufacturers, and a pretty good minor league baseball team. It also happens to be where I live with my husband and our three children. Our second largest City, Beaverton, is home of Nike world head-quarters. Our unincorporated areas are home to dairy, hops and clover farms, and nurseries. We are home to the most diverse community of people in Oregon. Our neighborhoods are urban, suburban, and rural; each one with its own unique culture and approach to civic life. We have the highest median income in the state and two of the state's highest poverty census block groups. All of those facts impact the lives of the people who live here, how they may or may not experience conditions of poverty, both directly and indirectly, and their access to opportunities. (Attached Issues of Poverty 2020 Document)

As the Community Action agency for Washington County, we conduct an annual needs assessment so that we can understand and respond to the unique and changing needs and resources of our community. We analyze the data, engage our community, and work along side our neighbors to build systems, programs, and pathways that help people build healthy, stable, productive lives. At our board meetings, elected officials, program participants, and private sector representatives work together to address the causes and conditions of poverty - because when people in our community are experiencing conditions of poverty, it impacts all of us.

Through regular analysis of community needs and resources, intentional community engagement, and critical partnership building, our Community Action organization has helped build social infrastructure

that grows thriving communities and provides permanent pathways out of poverty. This infrastructure has been critical to our community since our founding in 1964. We were here when the community launched the initial war on poverty. We were here during the great recession and recovery. And our deep community connections, and long standing partnerships were called upon again as the health and economic crisis of COVID-19 hit our most vulnerable neighbors the hardest. Using CSBG-CARES Act funding, Community Action coordinated and expanded capacity of a broad coalition of faith-based and culturally specific organizations to respond to the needs of our most isolated and vulnerable community members. Together, we:

1. Helped family child care providers keep their business open safely so that they could care for the children of essential workers and continue to support their own families.
2. Helped more than 7,000 families keep their lights, heat, and water on so that they could shelter in place
3. Helped more than 4,000 families keep their homes through eviction prevention assistance
4. Helped 28 partner organizations expand operations to get healthy and culturally appropriate food and essential supplies to thousands of our most isolated families

The Community Services Block Grant is so much more than a program. It is a cornerstone of our community infrastructure. The CSBG funds are a small but vital piece of our organization's budget. Our piece of Oregon's allocation represents roughly 1.5% of the agency budget (pre-covid). Yet these funds are critical to the organization's ability to leverage private, local, state and federal investments and deploy them effectively to impact the lives of nearly 30,000 of our community members each year. With the assistance of CSBG dollars, our Community Action organization provides community-based programs across a variety of categories including financial education, career coaching, food assistance, energy assistance and efficiency, emergency shelter, eviction prevention and rehousing assistance, parenting supports, small business development, and early childhood education.

Because of CSBG, we are able to bridge each of these program areas and provide comprehensive services that address the needs of the whole individual and family. We have found, and studies have shown, that families and individuals are more successful in their efforts to escape poverty when interventions are sequenced and coordinated in a way that is reflective of the realities of the human experience. People are more likely to engage in education programs when they are not hungry. More likely to complete an education program if they have stable housing. More likely to obtain employment when there is support for job search. More likely to retain employment when they are able to weather bumps in the road on the way to economic stability.

I would like to tell you a bit about how this approach leads to meaningful change in people's lives by telling you about Patricia. Patricia lost her job and her home in the fall of 2019. For six years, she had been successfully supporting herself and her three children as a bartender in a hotel restaurant, but when hotel ownership changed she lost her job. She could no longer afford rent and found her family facing homelessness. As she struggled to find stability, she became increasingly anxious and depressed.

Patricia turned to Community Action to find the support she needed to get back on her feet.

At Community Action, Patricia worked closely with a career coach who encouraged her to consider furthering her education to increase her earning potential. Patricia liked the idea of becoming a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA), but she was afraid the course would be too hard. She did not have a strong educational foundation and the idea of six weeks of classes to learn a new technical field was daunting.

But her career coach was there to help her with every step along the way - starting with a resume. With her new resume in hand, Patricia applied to the Marquis Company's CNA training program, interviewed, and was accepted.

But she continued to face hurdles. She and her kids were living with friends and she still had no income. What if they were all evicted for not being on the lease? How could she afford the gas she needed to travel to 30 minutes every day for classes? How could she afford to buy the scrubs she needed? Because of CSBG, we were able to make sure these barriers did not become road blocks on her path to success.

The classes were difficult, and Patricia struggled to keep going. Throughout the six weeks of intense course work, her career coach was a constant source of encouragement. When Patricia felt tired or frustrated, her coach was always there to say, "I know you can do it." These words kept her going, and she went on to proudly prove that her coach was right. In February 2020, she successfully completed the training and became a full-time employee at Marquis Assisted Living!

In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic brought new risks to her health care position. But Patricia loved the fact that she was helping people every day, and she felt safe with the precautions and procedures that were put in place.

At Marquis Assisted Living, Patricia sees herself as more than a CNA. In addition to providing medical support, she worked to alleviate the isolation so many of her patients were feeling.

And as the economic challenges of the pandemic continue to impact families, Patricia is grateful to be in a field that is in such high demand. That kind of job security is a huge relief to her.

Thank you for believing in people like Patricia. Because of CSBG, she has a job that she loves and a new-found confidence. Patricia sees this as a first step on a new career journey. She says – “Who knows, maybe when I’m 60, I’ll be a doctor.”

By raising the eligibility income level to 200% this bill would allow Patricia to continue on the path she has worked so hard for. As a CNA working full time at \$22/ hour she is under 200% FPL for her family of 4 and her hard-won stability is tenuous. Between rent, child care and transportation costs, Patricia has no margin for error in her monthly budget. An illness that keeps her out of work, a costly car repair, or any other unexpected expense can derail her progress. With this change, Patricia can continue to receive support from her career coach, move forward on her goals and leave a life of insecurity behind for good.

People’s experiences of poverty are as unique and diverse as our community itself. No single program or intervention can end poverty on its own. Because of CSBG, we have a dedicated focus on building strong partnerships, coalitions, and collaborations that remove barriers to accessing opportunities for low-income community members. A few examples that CSBG makes possible and that we are especially proud of include:

1. Co-location and coordinated services: Transportation is a challenge for many of our low-income community members. Our community has told us that between geography and competing demands on time and attention, getting basic needs met when living in poverty can be a full-time job unto itself. For this reason, we co-locate with key partners like the local branches of our WIC program, Department of Human Services, mental health crisis center, Family Justice Center and health clinics to maximize the impact of public investments in achieving our shared outcomes and addressing the multiple and often complex needs of households experiencing co-occurring crises.
2. Upstream interventions, collaborative program design, and case-conferencing: We work closely with a range of public and private partner organizations to design programs and interventions that leverage the strengths of each partner to support the best outcomes for families. Some examples of this are our Whole Family Project – a collaboration of Portland Community College, our workforce development agency, Department of Human Services, Head Start, and local health care providers. Our Benefits Enrollment Center that works with our local Area Agency on Aging to go to the homes of local seniors and people with disabilities and ensure that they have the supports they need to age in place. And our Preventative Staffing group – a collaborative group of public and private entities that staff potential child welfare cases to support families at risk of having children enter foster care and help families stay together.
3. Needs Assessment, data sharing, and outcome measurement: The breadth and depth of our work is such that it can be challenging to explain and quantify our full impact. Most people know us by which

part of our network of interventions they interact with most directly. And yet we are committed to transparency, accountability, and constant quality improvement. That requires us to be able to see the outcomes of our work both by each individual intervention and as a whole organization. To that end, we have invested in data integration and staff capacity to run data driven interventions and make course corrections to improve outcomes.

Very plainly, CSBG is essential to the health and vitality of our communities. Much like roads, bridges, and schools – CSBG is what connects an often fragmented set of resources into a cohesive system that provides pathways to opportunity for low-income community members. CSBG leads the formation of effective, efficient connections between the range of investments made in our people to build thriving communities. Expanding, modernizing, and cementing the Community Services Block Grant will ensure that our low-income individuals and families are centered as we rebuild to a new normal and for years to come.

Thank you again for your time and consideration of this bill.