

**Health and Human Services Committee
Community Services Block Grant Program
February 7, 2014**

**Thomas Pristow, Director
Division of Children and Family Services
Department of Health and Human Services**

Good afternoon Senator Campbell and members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Thomas Pristow, (T-H-O-M-A-S P-R-I-S-T-O-W), Director, Division of Children and Family Services within the Department of Health and Human Services.

I am speaking to you today concerning Nebraska's State Plan for Community Service Block Grant (CSBG) funds for Federal FY2015 and FY2016. Nebraska submits a plan every two years to the Office of Community Services in the United States Department of Health and Human Services laying out what the State of Nebraska and community action agencies will do in the specified period. The CSBG Act governs this federally mandated program and the act requires a legislative hearing once every three years. That is why we are here today.

CSBG funds are federal funds distributed to the states and earmarked by federal law for distribution to eligible entities that, in Nebraska, are community action agencies. A formula based on each state's poverty population determines each state's grant amount. Nebraska receives approximately \$4.7 million dollars annually, less than one (1) percent of the federal allotment.

CSBG funding provides a range of services and activities to assist the needs of low-income individuals. Community action agencies are required to provide services and activities addressing key areas. The services and activities are determined locally through needs assessments and other community-based assessment tools. Agencies report outcomes and activities twice a year and send an annual report going to the federal funder every February.

Nebraska recognizes nine community action agencies serving all 93 counties. The board of each community action agency is comprised of 1/3 low-income representatives, 1/3 elected officials or their representative, and 1/3 private sector representatives all who live in the community action agency service area. Community action agency board members are responsible for planning, management and operation of the agency; and the state is responsible for monitoring and oversight of the agencies to assure compliance with federal and state laws and regulations.

Guidance on the federal fiscal year 2015 and 2016 state plan will come out in April 2014. Nebraska will submit its state plan to the federal Office of Community Services by

September 1, 2014. Copies of the plan will be available for public comment prior to submission per CSBG Act requirements. We anticipate level funding for FY2015.

Per federal law, 90% of the funds go to Nebraska's nine community action agencies. The state may use up to 5% of the funds for state administration of the grant and the remaining 5% of funds are discretionary funds used to provide training and technical assistance to community action agencies.

The Community Services Block Grant is only one funding source for community action activities. It is the base funding to allow agencies to leverage additional private and public dollars for their programs. Last year, agencies leveraged more than 79 million dollars, or \$19.52 per CSBG dollar, in other federal, state and local dollars.

Thank you for allowing me to present Nebraska's intention to submit the Community Services Block Grant state plan and to provide you a small sampling of what community action does in our state. If you are not familiar with the community action agency in your district, I invite you to visit those agencies.

I have included a handout that gives some examples of CSBG activities and a list of the nine community action agencies in Nebraska.

Thank you. I will be happy to answer any questions you have.

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EXAMPLES OF COMMUNITY SERVICES BLOCK GRANT ACTIVITIES

Community Action Agencies conduct an in depth community needs assessment at least once every three years. This community needs assessment provides a picture of the services and programs needed; strengths and opportunities in the community to address low-income issues, poverty and helping individuals achieve self-sufficiency. Since 2010, Community Action of Nebraska in partnership with DHHS released three State and Regional Community Assessment Reports. This statewide effort to collect data on the perceptions and experiences of Nebraskans is part of a five year project that will produce two comprehensive reports and three topic specific reports. To date, Community Action of Nebraska released one comprehensive report and two topic specific surveys on Financial Behaviors and Employment. The second comprehensive report will be released March 11, 2014 in Lincoln. The 2010 report received national attention in the National Association of State Community Services Programs 2010 Annual Report.

Agencies continue to focus on holistic approaches to alleviating poverty. Much of their efforts are around indepth case management for their clients. While each agency is diverse and offers a variety of services based on their community, several programs are similar including: Head Start, Early Head Start, and adult education programs; job training and direct employment of low-income individuals; AmeriCorps; housing services; child care; homeless shelter and other homeless assistance; migrant services.

Emergency assistance is also a key program area for community action agencies. These services provide rental assistance, utility deposits and arrearages, food and transportation; alcohol and drug counseling; mental health services; food pantries, food banks and the commodity foods program. Agencies also collaborate with other state agencies and local organizations to operate programs such as public health, including W.I.C., Maternal/Child Health, and immunizations; senior centers and other senior programs including home-delivered meals, transportation and telephone reassurance; youth mentoring projects; and the low-income weatherization program.

In federal fiscal year 2012, community action agencies in Nebraska provided services to more than 104,000 individuals, from more than 40,000 families, facing a variety of barriers to self-sufficiency. More than 31,000 of these were children and more than 13,000 were seniors. Community Action Agencies continue to serve mostly families at or below 125 percent of poverty. Sixty-eight percent of the families served were in poverty. Twenty-five percent of the families were in severe poverty.

Community action agencies do more than just provide services to low income individuals and families. They assist in bringing in resources and dollars into the community through

employment assistance and job training, tax preparation, child support recovery assistance, home renovation and energy conservation among other programs. For example, in 2012, Community Action Agencies helped more than 1,500 people find employment. Community Action Agencies also provided tax assistance to 8,643 Nebraskans, bringing more than \$10 million of tax refunds to Nebraska communities. This was an average return of \$1,157 per filer.