Support the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG)

ACTION NEEDED:
Urge your members of Congress - especially those who serve on the House and Senate Appropriations Committees - to maintain funding for the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services’ (HHS) Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) program at or above the Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 level of $745 million through the annual appropriations process. Additionally, urge your members to reauthorize CSBG—which expired in 2003—to provide greater long-term certainty for counties leveraging the program.

BACKGROUND:
The U. S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Administration for Children and Families (ACF) administers the CSBG, which supports activities that mitigate the root causes of poverty. CSBG-eligible activities vary depending on local needs, but often include services related to educational attainment, accessing and maintaining employment and self-sufficiency, household budget management, obtaining adequate housing and promoting greater community participation. Most CSBG funding is distributed to states, which must pass at least 90 percent of the funds through to eligible local entities.

Counties play an integral role in administering CSBG. The program operates in 99 percent of the nation’s counties through a network of over 1,000 eligible public or private entities. Eligible entities are primarily Community Action Agencies (CAAs) designated under the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 (P.L. 88-482). Local elected officials or their representatives must (by law) make up one-third of each CAA board of directors; these boards are responsible for ensuring that agencies continue to assess and respond to the causes and conditions of poverty in their communities, achieve anticipated family and community outcomes and operate in an administratively and fiscally sound manner.

According to the latest annual report from the National Association for State Community Services Programs (NASCSP), in FY 2017 the CSBG network served 16.9 million individuals living in poverty. CSBG is an increasingly important and effective tool for promoting self-sufficiency, with the number of individuals obtaining employment through CSBG network assistance growing.

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In FY 2017, the CSBG network served 6.9 million children (41 percent of program participants) and 3.6 million individuals 55 years and older (21 percent of program participants.)

Source: NACo Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates 2017
18 percent between FY 2013 and FY 2017. The block grant’s flexible structure allows CAAs to employ a two-generation approach to combating poverty: in FY 2017, the CSBG network served 6.9 million children (41 percent of program participants) and 3.6 million individuals 55 years and older (21 percent of program participants).

As a discretionary program, CSBG funding is subject to the annual appropriations process. Congress provided $745 million in funding for CSBG in FY 2021, the highest level of funding the program has received in its 38-year history.

**COVID-19:** The CARES Act provided $1 billion in supplemental funding for CSBG to be allocated to eligible entities based on the proportionate share included in the FY 2020 State CSBG or Tribal CSBG Plan. The supplemental CSBG funding may be used to provide services to individuals earning up to 200 percent of the federal poverty line (a change from the existing statutory cap at 125 percent of the federal poverty line). Additionally, within existing allocations, state CSBG funding may be used to support emergency response that is consistent with statutorily allowable activities.

**KEY TALKING POINTS**

The Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) distributes funds to support activities that have a measurable and potentially major impact on the causes of poverty.

States must by law pass 90 percent of CSBG funds to eligible local entities.

CSBG allows counties and Community Action Agencies (CAAs) to design and implement anti-poverty programs tailored to an individual community’s needs, including programs that employ a two-generation approach.

In FY 2017, the CSBG network served 16.9 million individuals, including 6.9 million children.

Outcomes under CSBG continue to improve, with the percentage of individuals accessing employment through CSBG networks increasing by 18 percent between FY 2013 and FY 2017.

Converting CSBG into a competitive grant program would disadvantage smaller communities that lack the capacity to hire grant writers. Further, CSBG already has a competitive component, as states can use a percentage of their allocation for discretionary grants.

For further information, contact Rachel Mackey at 202.661.8843 or rmackey@naco.org.