

Strong, Secure Families - Sustainable Communities

Serving Barron, Chippewa, Dunn, Pepin, Pierce, Polk and St. Croix Counties.

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Budget Plan Will Impact Local Programs

House Budget Plan will have immediate impact on local Community Action Programs

Local services to families, senior citizens, displaced workers and low income people are jeopardized by the recent Congressional proposal to cut important federal funding to Community Action Agencies, according to Paul Streif, Board President of West CAP which serves seven counties in west Central Wisconsin.

This past week the Appropriations Committee in the House of Representatives released a proposal to immediately eliminate funding by March 4, 2011 from the current federal budget for the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) – a program that provides a key source of funding for Community Action Programs like West CAP.

“West CAP is often the first call when families face the kind of serious and unexpected problems that are common in an economic downturn – the loss of a job, utility shut-off, or problems with housing. As a local organization, West CAP is able to respond to their situation and then help plan for a longer term solution,” Streif said. In 2010, West CAP provided direct services to almost 5,000 households, and fielded thousands of additional calls and referrals. Streif notes that without West CAP’s ability to manage these requests, they will instead go to already over stretched county services staff and budgets.

Community Action agencies are non-profit organizations governed by boards of directors with equal representation from local elected officials, low-income residents and the private sector. Streif, who represents the Barron County Board of Supervisors, pointed out the importance of local control. “Our board members understand their community, and they know what programs are most needed and most effective.”

West CAP’s unique structure also allows it to operate programs in a very cost efficient manner – which is one of the goals of both Congress and the President. “Our administrative expenses are only 8% of our budget” Streif said. “Our staff is flexible and not tied to long-term program contracts or benefits. This means we can respond quickly and develop innovative

solutions targeted to meet local needs.” Community Services Block Grant funding enables West CAP to provide a central role in coordinating services between local programs, helping to share resources and provide efficient and cost effective program management.

Streif noted that Community Services Block Grant funding provides a base of support for all of West CAP’s programs, including the development of innovative programs that help families and communities become self-sufficient - programs that provide skills training for better jobs, significant reductions in home energy costs, access to affordable car loans for work needs, training to prepare for responsible homeownership, and participation in shared cooking club sessions that provide healthy family meals. It also makes it possible for West CAP to operate programs like the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program, which provides funding for vouchers to seniors for purchasing products directly from local farms but doesn’t provide any funds to cover staff and administrative costs to operate the program.

West CAP also uses Community Services Block Grant funding to raise and leverage funds from other sources, including from the private sector. In 2010, West CAP raised \$418,000 in local funds – often as matching funds for other grants. “If the Community Services Block Grant is cut it will profoundly hamper West CAP’s ability to obtain non-government resources for families and communities and put a greater burden on local governments” Streif said.

For almost 30 years, the West CAP, along with almost 1,100 CAPs across the country, has received federal funding from the Community Services Block Grant. The CSBG was created by Congress in 1982 during the Reagan administration. Funds are distributed by formula to the States and then to local agencies based on the number of persons in poverty. In recent years, Congress has appropriated \$700 Million nationally for the Community Services Block Grant. West CAP received \$378,000 from these funds in 2010.

“Families and communities have long turned to West CAP for help” Streif said, “but never more so than during the current economic downturn. Now, more than ever, we need both public and private investments to respond to community needs and move families to financial stability. This proposal to immediately cut Community Services Block Grant funds is very short-sighted and will hurt local citizens at a time when they need help the most.”

West CAP serves the counties of Barron, Dunn, Chippewa, Pepin, Pierce, Polk and St. Croix. It is one of 16 Community Action Agencies in Wisconsin.

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