

# Public Hearing on the Community Services Block Grant

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Good day. My name is Tiel Smith, Chief Executive Officer of the Rural Alaska Community Action Program, also known as RurAL CAP. I oversee the agency's community development plan and work associated with the implementation of the Community Services Block Grant, otherwise known as CSBG. I am joined by Jasmine Boyle, our Chief Operating Officer.

## A NATIONAL NETWORK WORKING TOGETHER

The national network of Community Action Agencies serves as a highly effective community-based resource which works to empower low-income individuals, families, and communities to succeed. Our work, around the country, is poverty alleviation in partnership with local communities. The Community Service Block Grant is at the core of this success.

CSBG makes federal funds available to the State of Alaska which provides core funding to reduce poverty, revitalize communities, and to empower low-income individuals and families to become self-sufficient. Funding is issued from the federal government to the Division of Community and Regional Affairs of the Alaska Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development and then administered by Grants Administrator, Pauletta Bourne, who is present with us today. RurAL CAP maintains a longstanding and healthy partnership with the State.

As a private, statewide, 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, RurAL CAP is one of more than 1,000 Community Action Agencies in the nation tasked with the unique mission to alleviate the root causes and conditions of poverty.

## LOCALLY DRIVEN SOLUTIONS

RurAL CAP is the only federally designated Community Action Agency in Alaska and single eligible recipient for 95% of the state's CSBG funds. Annually, RurAL CAP receives about \$2.5 million in CSBG funds to support programs and services benefitting low-income individuals and families statewide.

Governance for RurAL CAP is provided by a tripartite 24-member Board of Directors representing every major region of the state. The board meets quarterly and maintains a balance of representatives of lower-income areas, elected public officials, and private sector organizations.

The Board of Directors assesses the challenging circumstances affecting low-income populations with RurAL CAP's Executive Leadership and together they collaboratively set agency policy.

Needs are derived from the development of a comprehensive Community Needs Assessment which covers the entire state of Alaska. Following, priority service delivery and programming initiatives are identified. A logic model is prepared and serves as a draft Work Plan alongside a proposed Funding Strategy. When finalized and adopted by the board, staff implement the Work Plan and Funding Strategy.

## FLEXIBILITY TO MEET EMERGING NEEDS

CSBG is a flexible form of funding developed by the U.S. Congress to allow grantees to design and implement programs that grow out of locally identified needs. CSBG provides the opportunity to pilot new programs, remain responsive to emerging issues, and the ability to ensure that strong, outcome-focused oversight covers all the diverse programs offered by the agency.

RurAL CAP uses this core funding from CSBG to leverage several million dollars in other public and private sector funds which are used to expand the delivery of critical services.

## STATEWIDE IMPACT

During 2021, the agency employed 502 Alaskans in 57 communities who provided services to low-income individuals and families as determined by the Community Needs Assessment. RurAL CAP serves rural and urban communities through delivering innovative, community-driven programs and services including:

- Serving prenatal women, children, and families through early childhood education. Promoting socio-emotional development, healthy practices, and cultural richness, and school readiness. These programs include the Child Development Center, Head Start, Early Head Start, and Parents as Teachers.
- Housing programming promotes financial stability and independence through Homeless, Housing, and Shelter services; Homeownership; and Home Improvement services. These programs are available to Alaskans living with physical and/or mental health conditions as well as those navigating difficult financial circumstances.
- Health and Well-being services are delivered through community wellness, youth development, tribal justice, and victim service initiatives including a variety

of National Service, Wellness, and Training and Technical Assistance programs across the state.

Examples of programming include:

- Head Start services for pre-school children and their parents in Ketchikan
- Home weatherization for qualifying low-income residents in Juneau, Anchorage and parts of rural Alaska
- Affordable and Supportive Housing opportunities for families in Anchorage and on the Kenai Peninsula
- Childcare and Housing First services in Anchorage; and
- A shelter for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault serving Hooper Bay and the surrounding sub-region

Across FY 2021:

- 233 adults and 315 children received transitional or affordable housing
- 125 families' homes were weatherized
- 22 Tribes received training and technical assistance through the Alaska Tribal Justice Resource Center; and
- 639 children were enrolled in Early Head Start and Head Start programs

## DATA-DRIVEN PROGRAMMING

The State Plan contains detailed examples of outcome measures for each of RurAL CAP's CSBG-supported programs. This system of Results Oriented Management and Accountability, or ROMA, has received national recognition within the network of social service and Community Action Agencies as a model of comprehensive outcome-based performance management. These outcomes are required reporting for all Community Action Agencies. RurAL CAP implements performance management and quality improvement following this standard.

RurAL CAP strives to be a responsible steward of public funds. The agency operates highly technical federal and state programs including Head Start, Alaska Housing Finance Corporation programs, AmeriCorps, and CSBG. RurAL CAP is in good standing for all our programs and services. The organization places a high value on receiving clean financial and program audits and strives to provide cost-effective services that deliver meaningful results.

## LOOKING FORWARD

Through this pandemic, RurAL CAP has grown stronger, more agile, and is poised to partner across the state in new, innovative ways. The agency looks forward to working on emerging projects including:

- Rural housing development
- Food systems and increased food security

- Domestic violence and sexual assault victim services; and
- Trauma-informed care

This concludes the agency's testimony for the FY 2022 Community Services Block Grant State Plan.

Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,



Tiel Smith  
Chief Executive Officer  
RurAL CAP