

**HOWARD** [00:00:01] [RECORDER MALFUNCTION] Howard and I represent the 9th Legislative District in Omaha and I serve as Chair of this committee. I'll invite the members of the committee to introduce themselves.

**CAVANAUGH** [00:00:11] Machaela Cavanaugh, District 6, west-central Omaha, Douglas County.

**HOWARD** [00:00:13] Also assisting the committee is our legal counsel Jennifer Carter and our committee clerk Sherry Shaffer and our committee pages, Maddy and Erika. The department has requested a public hearing for the Community Service-- Services Block Grant and we're excited to hear more about it. Thank you, Director.

**MATT WALLEN** [00:00:30] Well, good afternoon, Chairperson Howard and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Matt Wallen, M-a-t-t W-a-l-l-e-n, and I serve as the director of the Division of Children and Family Services for the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. I am here today to provide an overview of the Community Service Block Grant program in Nebraska. The CSBG Act of 1998 states: In order to be eligible to receive a grant or allotment, the state shall hold at least one legislative hearing every three years in conjunction with the development of the state plan. So today will serve as that one legislative hearing within three years for us. Nebraska submits a state plan every two years to the Office of Community Services in the United-- in the United States Department of Health Human Services, establishing the state and Community Action agencies' intent for funding during the specified period. The fiscal year-- federal fiscal year 2019 and 2020 state plan was approved by the federal Office of Community Services to be implemented as of October 2018. A public hearing was held on August 20, 2018, prior to that submission as required by the CSBG Act. So on page-- on slide two, Community Action Program, or CAP, originated under former President Lyndon B. Johnson's administration. Through CAP, public agencies and private nonprofits called Community Action agencies reform to promote self-sufficiency and respond to immediate social and economic needs within their communities. In 1981, CAP and several other funding streams were consolidated into the Community Services Block Grant and reauthorized in 1998. The national CSBG network includes federal partners, state, territory, tribal grantees, CSBG-eligible entities, state Community Action associations, and national partner associations. CSBG is administered federally by the Office of Community Services within the Administration for Children and Families within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. CSBG funding is distributed to CSBG-eligible entities, which are most commonly Community Action agencies. Membership associations such as state Community Action associations and national membership associations assist in supporting the CSBG network as well. As per Nebraska's state regulations at 481 NAC 1-002. The purpose of CSBG is to provide assistance to states and local communities working through a network of Community Action Agencies and other neighborhood-based organizations for the reduction of poverty, the revitalization of low-income communities, and the empowerment of low-income families and individuals in rural and urban areas to become fully self-sufficient. And

on page 4, slide number four, we can see we've provided a map that shows the geographical footprint for each of the nine Community Action agencies in Nebraska. Turning to the next page, we've provided the name and location for each of the nine Community Action agencies around Nebraska. So on slide six, we'll see CSBG funds are federal funds distributed to the states and earmarked by federal law for distribution to eligible entities which in Nebraska are Community Action agencies. A formula based on each state's poverty population determines each state's grant amount. Nebraska receives more than \$4.9 million annually. Each state determines the formula used to distribute the block grant to the network of designated eligible entities, taking care that all areas are adequately served. Nebraska recognizes nine Community Action Agencies serving all 93 counties. Per-- per federal law, 90 percent of the funds go to the-- Nebraska's nine Community Action agencies. The state may use up to 5 percent of the funds for state administration of the grant and the remaining 5 percent of the funds are discretionary funds for purposes such as training and technical assistance for agencies. Community Action of Nebraska assists in providing training and technical assistance services to the Community Action agencies. On slide seven, see Nebraska's Community Action agencies conduct an in-depth community needs assessment at least once every three years. The community needs assessment provides a picture of the services and programs needed, which includes identifying strengths and opportunities in the community to address low-income issues, poverty, and helping individuals achieve self-sufficiency. The Community Action agencies must administer the CSBG through a tripartite board that participates in the development, planning, and evaluation of the programs. The board of each agency is comprised of one-third low-income representatives, one third elected officials or their representatives, and one-third private-sector representatives, all who live in the agency service area. The agencies are accountable for their plans, results, and efforts to adapt to the needs of the people they serve. Community Action agencies implement a comprehensive, performance-based management system called Results Oriented Management and Accountability. Through this system the agencies establish an objective and measurable goals, described the organizational processes and capacity required to meet these goals, develop performance indicators to qualify the success of each intervention, and evaluate their results versus anticipated outcomes and improve their services and programs to better serve the families and communities in their respective service delivery areas. In order to maintain a strong culture of accountability, a network of nationally certified Roma trainers in Nebraska provides continuing education to community agents-- action agency staff and board members. The state is responsible for monitoring and providing oversight of the agencies to assure compliance with federal and state laws and regulations and to ensure organizational standards are met. CSBG funding provides for a range of services and activities to assist the needs of low-income individuals. Community Action agencies are required to provide the funded services and activities addressing these needs in Nebraska. Agencies focus on holistic approaches to alleviating poverty. Much of their efforts are focused around in-depth case management for their clients. While each agency is diverse and offers a variety of services based on their communities, several programs are similar including Head Start, Early Head Start, adult education programs, job training and direct employment of low-income individuals, AmeriCorps, housing services, childcare, homeless shelter and other homeless assistance and migrant services. Emergency assistance is also a key program area for Community Action

agencies. These services provide rental assistance, utility deposits, and payment of past-due-- bills due with a shut-off notice, food and transportation, alcohol and drug counseling, mental health services, and food pantries, food banks, and a commodity foods program. Agencies also collaborate with other state entities such as the Division of Public Health's WIC and maternal child health program and immunizations programs as well as Nebraska Energy Offices for low-income weatherization program. They work with local organizations to operate programs such as senior centers and other senior programs, including home-delivered meals and transportation and youth mentoring projects. On slide nine, you'll see agencies report outcomes and activities twice a year and send an annual report to the Office of Community Services with the Administration for Children and Families within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. In federal fiscal year 2017, Community Action Agencies in Nebraska provided services to more than 84,000 low-income individuals, for more than 26,000 families facing a variety of barriers to self-sufficiency. More than 24,000 of these were children and more than 11,000 of these were senior citizens. The agencies continue to serve mostly families at or below 125 percent of the federal poverty level. I would like to take a moment to highlight a couple of the many success stories that show how CSBG funding is used to serve Nebraskans. Specifically, these are success stories involving Community Action agencies from the legislative districts of a few of the senators serving on this committee. Community Action Partnership of Mid-Nebraska identified affordable food as being one of the top basic needs respondents struggled with based upon the 2016 Community Action of Nebraska State and Regional Community Assessment Report. To assist in addressing this need, mobile produce pantries were implemented to go to different Buffalo County communities twice a month. From July 18, 2017, through November 16, 2017, there were nine mobile produce pantries that served a total of 938 households, computing to approximately 3,116 individuals. An average of 16 towns were represented at each mobile site. Based on food donations, food products from the food rescue program, and produce from the Food Bank of the Heartland, a total of 43,120 pounds of food was distributed to community members in that time frame, and that time frame, again, was July 2017 through November 2017. Northeast Community-- Northeast Nebraska Community Action Partnership, NNCAP, identified a common barrier for homeless or near-homeless clients as not being familiar with the services available in their communities. On June 23, 2017, NNCAP participated in a one-day event in Norfolk, Nebraska, called Project Homeless Connect to provide direct services and resources to the population of homeless or near-homeless individuals. Project Homeless Connect Norfolk served 226 individuals during the one-day event. The Eastern Nebraska Community Action Partnership, ENCAP, distributed 33,920 food boxes throughout Douglas and Sarpy Counties through ENCAP's nutrition center and hunger relief efforts in federal fiscal year 2017. CSBG funds allow ENCAP to utilize this program to address the client's immediate need of food; however, it also allows ENCAP to work with families to wrap around additional services, address safety concerns, and increase their ability for self-sufficiency to address the root cause of the client's food insecurity. In that-- on page 10, I'll just note that-- you know, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to present information regarding Nebraska's submission to the CSBG 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 one of those agencies. Again, I want to thank Chairperson Howard and members of the

Health and Human Services Committee for the opportunity to provide an informational briefing related to the CSBG grant. I want to thank all of our Community Action Agencies and the thousands of volunteers that donate their-- their time throughout the year to help support the work of the Community Action agencies. And with that, I would certainly be happy to answer any questions that the committee members might have.

**HOWARD** [00:12:27] Thank you.

**MATT WALLEN** [00:12:28] Thank you.

**HOWARD** [00:12:29] Are there questions? Senator Cavanaugh.

**CAVANAUGH** [00:12:30] Thank you, Chairman Howard. Thank you, Deputy Director Wallen. And thank you for this informative update on the Community Services Block Grant, a lot of information that's new to me. I wanted to-- I saw on slide six, the 5 percent of funds are discretionary funds. Could you just give a little bit more information as to what that means?

**MATT WALLEN** [00:12:55] Sure. Sure. The-- what it-- what it means is it-- it gives us a little more flexibility with those discretionary funds and what we do is we work with and-- and-- and provide most of those funds to the Community Action of Nebraska. And they really assist with coordinating the nine Community Action agencies. They do some additional training and coordination-type efforts.

**CAVANAUGH** [00:13:18] And is that the structure of how the funds are-- are used, does that come down from the federal government or is that something that we were able to do ourselves?

**MATT WALLEN** [00:13:28] Well, we have to-- per the federal government, 90 percent of the funds have to go to the-- to the nine agencies and then we have the 5 percent discretionary and the 5 percent administrative funds. But for the most part, to serve the purposes identified in Nebraska, to help communities alleviate poverty-- poverty and to achieve self-sufficiency, the Community Services Block Grant is-- is fairly flexible. And it's often utilized by these agencies to leverage state-- you know, state or other federal funds volunteer hours--

**CAVANAUGH** [00:14:00] Sure.

**MATT WALLEN** [00:14:00] --all sorts of different funding avenues.

**CAVANAUGH** [00:14:04] I have a couple other questions but-- so on slide nine, when you're talk-- taking us through the success stories--

**MATT WALLEN** [00:14:12] Yes.

**CAVANAUGH** [00:14:14] --the-- the Community Action Partnership of the-- of Mid-Nebraska, you talked about a food rescue program. I'm familiar-- in Omaha we have Saving Grace, which is a food rescue program. And I-- I'm not familiar-- are-- if-- is that the food rescue program or is there a statewide program?

**MATT WALLEN** [00:14:32] I mean each-- each of the Community Action agencies really partner with what is in their local communities.

**CAVANAUGH** [00:14:39] OK.

**MATT WALLEN** [00:14:39] So there's not one kind of overarching, if you will.

**CAVANAUGH** [00:14:43] And how-- I'm very interested in-- in just the food rescue concept and how we can be utilizing that to feed our food-insecure populations. So would it be possible-- could you help facilitate getting that information?

**MATT WALLEN** [00:14:57] Absolutely.

**CAVANAUGH** [00:14:59] Thank you. And then my final, I think, question is on the Eastern Nebraska Community Action Partnership you talked about the food boxes and as you're probably aware, yesterday we had a robust conversation on the floor of the Legislature about SNAP benefits. And when we had the hearing here in this committee on SNAP benefits, we heard from food pantries about food boxes. So is this program supplementing when people are not qualifying for SNAP or could you speak to it just a little bit more what the food boxes do and who they serve?

**MATT WALLEN** [00:15:41] Sure. Sure. I mean the ENCAP and NNAP and most of the other Community Action agencies, they work primarily with-- with low-income households. So I think the statistic is close to about 85 percent of the services they provide are to families or households at 125 percent of the federal poverty level. So-- so they're fairly low-income families. And these-- these organizations do a great job in-- in leveraging and maximizing, you know, all sorts of programs, from the homeless program, the NHAP pro-- program that we have, Nebraska Housing [SIC] Assistance Program, so it's really-- they help bring a lot of different efforts together within the communities to meet the needs of their communities. And it's really based on those community assessments that they do every three years to identify what are those specific needs in their communities.

**CAVANAUGH** [00:16:38] So for this specific program of the food boxes that the part-- the NNAP is offering--

**MATT WALLEN** [00:16:46] Yeah.

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**CAVANAUGH** [00:16:47] --are there requirements that are as rigorous as the SNAP process to-- to receive those food boxes?

**MATT WALLEN** [00:16:58] No. If there's--

**CAVANAUGH** [00:16:58] No.

**MATT WALLEN** [00:16:59] If there's a need and someone identify-- comes in and presents with a need, it's generally families, again, that are lower income or that are experiencing an immediate crisis, emergency assistance, those types of things.

**CAVANAUGH** [00:17:09] And they're administered like in-- in Omaha, they be administered through the food pantry, the Food Bank of the Heartland or together, those two-- those--

**MATT WALLEN** [00:17:15] Yep, that-- that partnership together. Yeah.

**CAVANAUGH** [00:17:17] OK. And just, again, to clarify, both SNAP benefits and this partnership are funded by federal dollars.

**MATT WALLEN** [00:17:28] The-- the CSBG and the-- the grant that goes to these--

**CAVANAUGH** [00:17:33] Yes.

**MATT WALLEN** [00:17:33] --are federal dollars, that's correct.

**CAVANAUGH** [00:17:35] OK. Thank you very much.

**MATT WALLEN** [00:17:35] Sure.

**HOWARD** [00:17:37] All right. Any other questions? Seeing none, thank you for your briefing today.

**MATT WALLEN** [00:17:42] Thank you for the opportunity.

**HOWARD** [00:17:45] All right. Now we are actually going to have a gubernatorial appointment for Dr. Alysson Muotri to the Nebraska Stem Cell Research Advisory Committee. And so we'll wait for her to get on the phone and then we'll do introductions for the senators when she's on the phone. [RECORDER MALFUNCTION] My colleagues introduce themselves starting on my right with Senator Murman.

**MURMAN** [00:19:12] Hello. I'm Senator Dave Murman from Glenvil: Clay, Webster, Nuckolls, Franklin, Kearney, Phelps, and southwest Buffalo County.