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Contact: Sharon Naragon
Communications Director
614-224-8500
sharon@oacaa.org

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CSBG cuts would cause Community Action to trim food pantries, health clinics, job training and more

COLUMBUS—Communities across Ohio would notice the impact of a 50 percent cut in the Community Services Block Grant, said the leader of Ohio's Poverty Fighting Network.

"President Obama has recommended cutting the core funding for Community Action Agencies in half," said Philip E. Cole, Executive Director of the Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies. "We are hearing from our 50 agencies that a cut like that will mean a drastic reduction in services at the local level."

CSBG, established under President Reagan in 1981, provides \$25 million to Ohio's 50 Community Action Agencies. Those agencies serve 800,000 people annually in all of Ohio's 88 counties. Local programs funded by CSBG include: job training and job placement assistance, transportation, meals for homebound seniors, prescription assistance, food pantries, child care and much, much more, Cole said.

"In Ohio towns and cities, Community Action is the leader in helping people," Cole said. "In addition to providing direct services, we partner with other non-profits and with local governments to address the unique problems of each locality."

The President's proposal also would make the remaining CSBG funds available under a federally mandated competitive process, reducing the flexible, local control of how poverty is fought in Ohio.

"Community Action Agencies know their communities," Cole said. "We conduct needs assessments at least every other year and implement programs to solve local, community problems. CSBG provides the flexibility to adjust to changing needs and respond to crises."

Among the programs at risk are:

- Response to disasters such as flooding in Lake County in 2006, and in Hancock County in 2007; and tornados in Fulton, Wood and Ottawa counties in 2010
- Food pantries in Highland, Clinton, Wayne, Medina, Pike, Holmes, Morrow, Columbiana counties and many others could close or reduce hours.

- Broadband Internet for 9-1-1 and first responders in Monroe County
- A prescription program for seniors in Marion County that saves residents an average of \$250,000 annually and has won several awards.
- Homeless shelters in Fayette County, Clermont County, Coshocton County and elsewhere.
- Emergency help for more than 5,000 in the City of Cincinnati for food, water, telephone, rent, prescriptions and bus tokens.
- Thousands of meals for homebound seniors in Adams, Brown, Highland, Pike, Muskingum and other counties.
- The only public transportation service in Columbiana and Hancock County
- The only dental clinic in Clermont County, serving 3,600 people in 2010 including hundreds of children.
- Employment Plus in Franklin County which helped 300 people in 2010 and many other employment programs.
- Business development in Pike County which has brought millions of dollars and hundreds of jobs to the local economy.
- Free tax preparation for thousands across the state.
- Elimination of summer feeding and camp programs in several regions. Often these programs are how poor children stay fed in the summer.
- Toys for Tots or Christmas giving programs that help thousands of children in Washington, Morgan, Pickaway, Highland and other counties.
- Unique, locally created programs such as a Certified Child Safety Seat Program in Wayne and Medina Counties that helps 300 babies ride safely every year and a Supervised Visitation Center in Fayette County that hosted 3,266 visits for families with child custody issues in 2010.

“It is amazing what Community Action accomplishes,” Cole said. “Our programs are unique. They are targeted to local issues and run by local people who want to help their neighbors. Without these services and the leadership Community Action provides in these communities, people may have nowhere to turn for help.”

Community Action Agencies are local, private, non-profit agencies governed by boards of directors with equal representation from local elected officials, low-income people and the private sector. The impact of Ohio’s Community Action Agencies is far reaching. Agencies leverage every CSBG dollar to bring in another \$22 to the network, Cole said.

“We recognize the dilemma Congress faces with the budget deficit and we are willing to absorb cuts at the level other programs face,” Cole said. “We suggest that instead of penalizing us for our success, Congress should increase the flexibility of other federal grants to allow organizations to direct their efforts at evolving local needs.”

The Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies represents the 50 Community Action Agencies around the state which serve the needs of low-income people in all of Ohio’s 88 counties. The agencies administer nearly \$750,000,000 in resources aimed at alleviating the problems of poverty in Ohio’s communities. They employ more than 6,000 people and provide service to nearly 800,000 Ohioans every year.

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