

*Testimony before the Appropriations and Human Services Committees  
September 21, 2020*

Good Afternoon, Senators Osten, Moore, Formica and Logan, and Representatives Walker, Abercrombie, Lavielle and Case and distinguished members of the Appropriations and Human Services Committees. My name is Kathleen Brennan and I am a Deputy Commissioner at the Department of Social Services (DSS). I am here before you to seek your approval of the Governor's Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2021 Allocation Plan for the **Social Services Block Grant (SSBG)**.

The SSBG is administered by the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) through its administrative agency, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Office of Community Services (OCS). DSS is designated as the principal state agency for the allocation and administration of the block grant within the state of Connecticut. The SSBG is a flexible funding source that allows states and territories to tailor social service programming to their population's needs.

Through the SSBG, Connecticut provides essential social services that help achieve a myriad of goals: to reduce dependency and promote self-sufficiency; to protect children and adults from neglect, abuse and exploitation; and to help individuals who are unable to take care of themselves to stay in their homes or to find the best alternative living arrangements. Part I, Section B on pages 3-4, in the proposed allocation plan before you, provides more detail related to the major use of SSBG funds.

Connecticut's final allocation in regular SSBG funds for FFY 2020 was \$17,524,135. The SSBG federal funding level for FFY 2021 has not yet been determined. For purposes of the development of this plan, we have estimated that the federal allocation for FFY 2021 will be level-funded from FFY 2020. If the block grant funding is less than estimated, an equally proportionate share of the reduction shall be applied to each category. Pursuant to section 4-28b of the Connecticut General Statutes, any transfers to or from any specific allocation over \$50,000 or ten percent of a specific allocation, whichever is less, would require resubmission to the joint committees of cognizance.

Pending the release of the federal budget, this plan estimates a total SSBG funding of \$24,065,031 to be available for FFY 2021. This figure reflects projected block grant funding of

\$17,524,135 and an estimated carry-forward funding of \$6,540,995.<sup>1</sup> The available FFY 2020 carryforward will be spent for FFY 2021 expenditures before utilizing the anticipated FFY 2021 block grant funding. Table A, on pages 10-11, highlights FFY 2019 expenditures, FFY 2020 estimated expenditures and FFY 2021 proposed expenditures, and the percentage change from FFY 2020 to FFY 2021.<sup>2</sup>

The FFY 2021 SSBG allocation plan provides funding for services in 12 of the 29 federally defined service categories. Such services include the following: case management services, counseling services, family planning services, home-based services, independent and transitional living services, employment services, legal services, protective services for adults, substance abuse services, home delivered meals, special services for persons with developmental or physical disabilities, and other services.

The allocation plan also includes the distribution of SSBG funds to other state agencies. Contracts for the provision of these services are subject to the competitive procurement provisions of Connecticut General Statutes §§ 4-212 to 4-219 and each individual state agency adheres to its procurement plan, submitted to and approved by the Office of Policy and Management. Each state agency establishes its own allocation process for support of SSBG services under its auspices. In addition, the Department also allocates SSBG funds, through direct contracts or sub-contractor agreements, to approximately 31 private non-profit providers.

Although 29 service categories are allowable, the categories identified in this allocation plan are based upon Connecticut's efforts to address barriers and gaps in services for its most vulnerable populations that meet the criteria identified on page 5 under the heading "The Target Population." Based upon need, categories can change from year to year.

The FFY 2021 allocation plan includes the following proposed allocation changes:

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<sup>1</sup> Carry-forward funding is used to ensure continuity of contractual funding early in the fiscal year and during provider transitions, as well as to create a buffer for changes in need during the fiscal year. In the event that the block grant allocation is reduced or need rises significantly such that more funding appears to be required for specific allocations, the Department will follow procedures for advising and requesting approvals from the committees of cognizance.

<sup>2</sup> Please note that the agency is seeking a technical correction to the previously submitted plan. There is a typographical error in Table B of the Allocation Plan. The total FFY 2021 Proposed Expenditures should be listed as \$19,632,568, which takes into account the amount DSS is adding in employment services for the Department of Labor. The correct amount of \$19,632,568 is listed in all other references throughout the plan. Additionally, updated expenditure figures are offered in Table A for FFY 2019 under family planning, home delivered meals, special services for persons with developmental or physical disabilities, other services, and total expenditures. Finally, updated expenditure figures are offered in chart III for family planning, and the subheading is updated to reflect the correct federal fiscal years.

***Case Management Services:*** The proposed FFY 2021 allocation plan increases Case Management Services by \$800,000 from \$2,636,338 to \$3,436,338. The increased allocation includes a one-time reallocation of \$800,000 from the Independent & Transitional Living Services category to the Case Management Services category. The reallocation of funds from the Independent & Transitional Living service category into the Case Management Services category allows the Department of Housing (DOH) to provide housing support case management services, an essential component to DOH's Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) eviction prevention and/or housing stabilization activities supported through the Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG).

***Employment Services:*** The proposed FFY 2021 allocation plan changes the state agency associated with these funds from DSS to the Department of Labor under the Employment Services category. The \$308,433 allocation in the approved FFY 2020 plan was to be used to support a planned employability pilot for households receiving Temporary Family Assistance (TFA). Planning for the pilot has been delayed due to the pandemic and other funds outside of SSBG are available to support the future implementation of the pilot. This plan proposes a one-time reallocation of \$308,433 to the Department of Labor to address increased employment needs resulting from the pandemic and economic downturn.

***Family Planning Services:*** The FFY 2021 plan proposes a one-time increase by \$400,000, from \$889,152 to \$1,289,152, to ensure continued SSBG-funded family planning services during the pandemic and associated economic downturn.

***Home-Based Services:*** The FFY 2021 plan proposes to allocate funding of \$2,879,264 in support of estimated expenditures based on the Department's trend analysis of current program participant activity. While this represents a reduction in the prior allocation level, this category has, over the most recent fiscal years, experienced significant underspending adding to the carryforward balance. Through the trend analysis, the Department estimates that the proposed allocation is sufficient to support and provide quality services. The Department will continue to analyze program activities and expenditures.

The FFY 2021 plan proposes to reallocate \$800,000 of FFY19 carryforward funds from the Home-Based Services category to the Independent & Transitional Living Services category. This reallocation will effectively replace the proposed reallocation of funds from the Independent & Transitional Living Services to Case Management Services and will be distributed to the Department of Housing to be obligated by September 30, 2020.

The FFY 2021 plan also proposes to reallocate \$1,000,000 of the unexpended FFY20 Home-Based Services funds to support increased service needs based upon the pandemic and the economic downturn as follows: Family Planning Services (\$400,000) as previously referenced, and Home Delivered Meals (\$600,000). These changes are identified as one-time activities.

***Home Delivered Meals.*** As just mentioned, the FFY 2021 plan proposes to increase the Department of Aging and Disability Services' Home Delivered Meals allocation by \$600,000 from \$427,500 to \$1,027,500. The one-time increase is targeted to support persons impacted by COVID-19.

***Independent & Transitional Living Services:*** As previously referenced, the Department of Housing will carry forward and transfer \$800,000 of FFY 20 funds from Independent & Transitional Living Services to Case Management Services. DOH shall utilize these one-time resources to support their COVID-19 related housing supports and eviction prevention case management activities not currently supported through DOH's CARES funding.

The FFY 2021 plan proposes the annualization of Emergency Housing Funds at \$75,000. When reviewing the Allocations by Program Table on page 18, it may appear that the Department is reducing its FFY 2021 proposed allocation. However, the Department's FFY 2020 estimated expenditures are inflated by expenditures that were incurred during FFY 2019 but not liquidated until FFY 2020. The Department's FFY 2020 estimated expenditures include carryforward funds from FFY 2019, which increased FFY 2020 to \$90,000 from the FFY 2020 proposed amount of \$45,000. The Department proposes to increase the base allocation of \$45,000 to \$75,000 in FFY 2021 based upon identified needs.

***Protective Services for Adults:*** Proposed expenditures for this line item are \$782,272, conforming with the enacted state biennial budget.

The proposed FFY 2021 funding levels for all other line items are not anticipated to result in an expansion or reduction of services and are identical to the funding levels proposed and adopted in the FFY 2020 plan.

In closing, we join the Governor and the Office of Policy and Management in recommending the approval of the Social Services Block Grant Allocation Plan for federal fiscal year 2021. Thank you for your review and attention in this matter. My staff and I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.