

February 11, 2011

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20502

**Dear President Obama:**

My name is Terry Belcoe. My real job is President/CEO of North Coast Credit Union in Bellingham, Washington. But I am writing to you today in my dual roles of board chair of the Skagit County Community Action Agency, and board chair of the United Way of Skagit County.

I am writing to ask that you reconsider your proposed cuts to Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) funding. While I personally fully support and appreciate your efforts to reduce our nation's massive deficit, I will also tell you that I fully support and appreciate the other quote from your State of the Union address when you said: "I am willing to eliminate whatever we can honestly afford to do without. But let's make sure that we're not doing it on the backs of our most vulnerable citizens."

The more than 1,000 Community Action agencies across the country comprise our nation's most effective local network for supporting our most vulnerable citizens – and guiding them on their paths to fulfilling their dreams and achieving self-sufficiency. In Washington State, our thirty Community Action Agencies, including in Skagit County, build healthy communities by weaving together an array of vital human services in every community throughout our state, rural or urban.

For almost 30 years, CSBG support has allowed Community Action to respond quickly and effectively to local needs by providing a broad range of services, most of which would not be self-sustaining without flexible funding like CSBG. In addition, CSBG allows Community Action agencies to be a center of positive activity in our local communities. Community Action is most often the "first stop" for people in crisis. Community Action is uniquely positioned to understand local needs, and to work across political and cultural divides to convene a broad array of nonprofits, churches, businesses, agencies, service organizations and individual volunteers to craft solutions that restore dignity and put people back to work. Over the years of building broad coalitions and hundreds of positive local partnerships, our community has come to trust and have confidence in Community Action, an irreplaceable asset for purchasing cooperation, coordination and a spirit of optimism.

Furthermore, Community Action leverages the modest amount of CSBG funding many times over in state, other federal, foundation, and individual support, as well as through hundreds of millions of dollars worth of volunteer engagement.

*CSBG is the fuel for a powerful engine that works where it counts most – at the community level.*

The impact of Community Action includes:

- Providing a "first stop" for those in need and critical services to those affected by the severe economic recession;
- Relieving stress and confusion, and addressing the complexity of needs, by navigating people to resources in our communities, including families recently impacted by the economic recession;
- Creating and retaining jobs, and supporting low-income people in a variety of ways that prepare them for and link them with living-wage employment;

- Building more positive communities where businesses both small and large have a better chance of flourishing;
- Helping newly returning and homeless Veterans, homebound and disabled individuals, and senior citizens living on fixed and limited incomes achieve dignity and economic stability;
- Engaging the power of neighbor helping neighbor through well-targeted volunteerism; and
- Strengthening communities by drawing together broad and diverse coalitions to solve local issues.

Flexible CSBG support is the central ingredient in each of these impacts. We thus believe CSBG is the best of all federal strategies: modest federal support activated at the community level, with an enormous return on investment.

In asking you to reconsider your call to reduce funding for the CSBG program and Community Action agencies, I speak first from my role as board chair for Skagit County Community Action Agency. During my years of association with this agency, I have come to appreciate not only the irreplaceable work they do for the most vulnerable members of our community, but also the central role CSBG funding plays in our ability to meet those needs.

I also speak to you in my role as board chair of the United Way of Skagit County. From that perspective, I see not only the direct vital services that Community Action provides for its low income and financially displaced neighbors in our community, but also the pivotal role the agency plays in coordinating access to the resources these families need in these most desperate of times.

Finally, I speak to you as a taxpayer and a member of this community. As we see funding for human services program drying up, the need to maximize the impact of every remaining dollar increases. There is no place for wasteful or inefficient use of the shrinking financial resources available to help those in need. That is why Community Action agencies and the funding to support them is so vital. In my extensive experience in working with local human services organizations, I have never seen an organization which more effectively uses the financial support it receives to create the greatest possible benefit for the clients it serves and the community in general. To eliminate the ability of Community Action agencies to do what they do so well will only succeed to either shifting these critical needs to less cost effective alternatives, or result in our most vulnerable citizens simply unable to get the most basic food, shelter or care that they look to us, as a nation, to provide.

Mr. President, we stand by you in these challenging times, and we are committed to working together to protect our most vulnerable, secure the present, and win the future. If you would like first hand proof, we would invite you and Michelle to Washington State to see CSBG in action.

In the meantime, we urge you and members of Congress to preserve CSBG at the current level, so that Community Action agencies can continue to serve our most vulnerable citizens in this time of skyrocketing need.

Sincerely,

Terry Belcoe  
President/CEO – North Coast Credit Union  
Board Chair – Skagit County Community Action Agency  
Board Chair – United Way of Skagit County