

Testimony to Joint Fiscal Committee

September 18, 2025

Alison Calderara, Capstone Community Action – on behalf of Vermont Community Action Partnership (VCAP)

Organization/Who We Serve

Good afternoon, my name is Alison Calderara and I am the Executive Director of Capstone Community Action serving Central Vermont. We are one of five Community Action Agencies serving 43,000 low income Vermonters across the state. We consider our work to be acting as anti-poverty strategists, and our services include early education programs designed to break the generational cycle of poverty; crisis fuel assistance, housing assistance including emergency shelter units, Food Shelf, weatherization and financial capabilities programs such as personal financial coaching and microbusiness counseling.

Impact

The last time I was here before you, the President's budget had "zeroed" out our Community Service Block Grant and our LIHEAP crisis fuel grant. We have now heard Senate Appropriations and the House have restored funding at a national level for both programs. It even miraculously has a small increase. This is good news as both sides of the aisle are working together to support these critical programs. However, we have a long road ahead before we can have these funds stabilized and in hand.

Most immediately concerning is timing. It is highly unlikely we will know anything definite about approval for either CSBG or LIHEAP by the time the budget year begins October 1st. There is a good chance that Congress will kick the can down the road with a continuing resolution (CR). According to Senator Welch's office, a CR may be our best chance to be ensured funding for this heating season, in the case of LIHEAP. Even so, all the LIHEAP staff have been dismissed. Because of this, the Senator's office is also very concerned that even if LIHEAP funds are approved in the budget, they could be impounded by the Trump administration. Currently for Capstone, our LIHEAP funds comprise \$300,000 for client assistance and \$158,000 for staffing support. We are already fundraising to supplement these dollars each year.

Impact on Vermonters

My biggest concern, despite some good news, is that it is almost October and I have no certainty about our funding and our ability to serve low income Vermonters. The season usually gets into full swing mid-November.

At Capstone, typically serve about 600 Vermonters each season.

- 78% of these Vermonters live at or below 150% of poverty
- 22% are over the age of 60
- 28% have a disabling condition.

These are very vulnerable Vermonters we are simply trying to keep warm and safe. In addition, we are seeing high prices in food and pressure on our Food Shelf. We are currently serving 1500 families at Capstone with 9,000 Food Shelf visits a year. Low-income Vermonters are facing the multiple threats of cuts to SNAP and rising food prices, high rents and high energy costs. This winter season and next year will be very tough for the Vermonters we serve.

Request

VCAP is very appreciative to have this opportunity to share our concerns. I am here to request that Legislators continue to stay engaged and communicating with us as we navigate so much uncertainty and threats to our backbone federal programs. Our partnership is mission driven to serve the low-income Vermonters who are going to be the most impacted by federal funding losses. We are working together now to plan and prepare how we can expand our strengths to meet this critical moment. I hope that together, we can keep this critical conversation going.