

Washington's Poverty Fighting Network: 30 Community Action Agencies in all 39 Counties Equipping Low-Income Individuals and Families to Exit Poverty

## 2023-24 Legislative Agenda

The Washington State Community Action Partnership believes ending generational poverty and inequity is the right thing to do. While markedly high inflation rates have begun to settle, most Washingtonians continue to struggle with soaring food costs, housing, and essential needs. Combined with stagnant and lower wages, there is a continued **significant increase of 3.2% in the statewide poverty rate** (*U.S. Census report, September 2023*). We urge Washington State Legislators to summon the moral and political will to invest in healthy and sustainable communities. Stabilizing and equipping our neighbors living in poverty is critical to help them achieve long-term well-being.

## Top Legislative Priorities

Washington State Community Action Partnership (WSCAP) is asking for **\$5,725,000** to supplement the federal Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) funding, which provides flexible resources for the 30 Community Action Agencies (CAAs) who serve all 39 counties in the state, to respond to urgent (and rapidly changing) community needs, including:

-  ensuring stability for Washington's under-served families, especially BIPOC communities who, despite being only one-third of the overall population, make up almost half of all Washingtonians in poverty; and
-  equipping low-income rural Washingtonians with access to food, housing, and job-readiness skills.

CSBG is the catalyst funding for CAAs to deliver economic relief services and sustain a locally powered and accountable infrastructure for social and economic justice in all counties across the state. By engaging low-income, BIPOC, and rural communities facing extreme systemic barriers to basic needs like housing, food security, and employment opportunities, CSBG returns up to \$56 to Washington for every dollar invested and ensures people with lived experience have a seat at the table to give a knowledgeable voice on how these funds serve their community.

CSBG can close the gaps where public funding streams do not fully meet the needs of customers or service providers. Not only does a state CSBG match support economic security for our customers, but it also helps ensure livable wages and good benefits for staff who deliver outreach and programs that are driven by and for members of their own communities, making this the best option to lift thousands of Washingtonians out of deep poverty.

## State Policy Priorities

### Equitably Equip All Washingtonians to Survive Higher Inflation and Cost of Living

WSCAP believes advancing opportunity and economic justice requires us to consider how we collect taxes and distribute revenue to support the building blocks of healthy communities, including cash assistance and safety net programs. The past two Legislative Sessions have seen historic progress in addressing Washington's uniquely regressive tax code, which costs our poorest residents six times more of their income than our richest families, and disproportionately impacts Washingtonians of Color. We support continued efforts to reduce the tax burden on our working poor and generate new revenue streams that reflect Washington's aspirations of fairness for all.

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### **Provide Basic Needs for Marginalized Communities**

- ☞ Maintain or increase Energy & Utility assistance for the state's most vulnerable residents
- ☞ Expand eligibility for the Working Families Tax Credit
- ☞ Continue work toward equitable Universal Healthcare solutions
- ☞ Eliminate Aged, Blind or Disabled recovery garnishments
- ☞ Align all cash grants with the standard of need and inflation
- ☞ Extend funding for TANF time limits through 2025
- ☞ Continue working toward a Guaranteed Basic Income model that ensures a floor for economic security

### **Increase Housing Stability and Create Community Pathways Out of Poverty**

*As the housing crisis continues across the state, we must demand equitable, affordable housing be included in all upzone areas by increasing density and increasing height allowances.*

- ☞ Continued investment in building new affordable homes, including multi-family housing, single family homes, repair of older homes and upzone permitting and construction
- ☞ Address rent stabilization to prevent homelessness
- ☞ Emphasize and highlight need for rural affordable housing
- ☞ Secure a permanent fund source for affordable housing
- ☞ Re-address the Housing & Essential Needs benefits cliff
- ☞ Support increased investments in homelessness prevention
- ☞ Support passage of "Nothing About Us Without Us"

### **Help Eliminate Food Insecurity**

- ☞ Extend funding for (CAP agency based) food banks and community-based emergency food programs, including capacity building
- ☞ Emphasize and highlight rural WA food deserts and insecurity
- ☞ Support OSPI's Universal Free School Meals for ALL Washington students, all grade levels
- ☞ Support correction of '23 Legislation of funding for Hunger Free Colleges, ensuring all Washington State college and university students have access to food, from allotted .50 FTE to original request of .75 FTE

### **Make Sure Families with Children have the Resources for Thriving and Safety**

- ☞ Provide additional child support dollars directly to children and families rather than using funds to reimburse the state for TANF/SFA grant costs
- ☞ Support extended funding for TANF time limits

- ☞ Continued support in pursuing full pass-through in childcare benefits
- ☞ Ensure stability to single parents by getting child support arrears back on the legislative radar

### **Build Diverse, Equitable, Inclusive Healthy Communities**

- ☞ Continued support for implementation of the 10-Year Plan to Reduce Poverty & Inequality in WA State
- ☞ Continue to support and amplify BIPOC-led efforts to address bias in policing and build equitable public safety

### **Wage equity**

- ☞ Focus on legislation which will bridge long-term funding gaps
- ☞ Right-size existing government-to-Non-Profit Organization (NPO) contracts
- ☞ Support Seattle Human Services Coalition in efforts to bring wage equity legislation to the statewide level

### **Move Toward an Equitable, Cleaner and Greener Environment**

- ☞ Ensure Justice 40 Communities' access to new Climate Commitment Act funding
- ☞ Support agencies working to promote fuel switching within rural communities
- ☞ Focus on equitable transitions in clean energy and fuel switching programs
- ☞ Advocate for equitable language in new HB1589 around electrification

### **Ensure Households Have Expanded Social Networks and Connections**

- ☞ Continue working to bring broadband internet services to rural areas, ensuring affordability and low-cost through the help of community navigator programs
- ☞ Provide a voice for equitable distribution of National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA)/Broadband Equity Access Deployment (BEAD) funding

### **Mobility investments that promote safety, community connection and access to opportunity**

- ☞ Implement and double down on "Move Ahead Washington" investments in safer, accessible streets and transit options for non- drivers.

### **Support Early Learning and Childcare for Families**

- ☞ Invest in the Fair Start for Kids Act framework.
- ☞ Improve child care affordability and sustainability and strengthen the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP).