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Testimony of
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Before the
House Energy and Water Development Appropriations Subcommittee

Oversight Hearing: Department of Energy's Weatherization Assistance Program
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Chairwoman Kaptur, Vice-Chairman Visclosky, Ranking Member Simpson, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding the Department of Energy's (DOE) Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP). My testimony will focus on my knowledge and experience administering and implementing a local weatherization program.

My name is Terry Jacobs and I am the Director of the Housing and Energy Department at WSOS/Great Lakes Community Action Partnership (GLCAP). GLCAP is community action organization with over fifty years' experience providing high quality programs and services to low and moderate income families in northwest Ohio and beyond. For the past eleven years, I have managed the weatherization program in a six county rural area of northwest Ohio.

Benefits of DOE WAP

Over the years, I have witnessed firsthand some of the many benefits resulting from families receiving weatherization services. Based on that experience, I believe the weatherization program is still fulfilling its original design and purpose since Congress created it in 1976. As stated in the 10CFR 440.1, the U.S. Department of Energy's Weatherization Assistance Program was created "to increase the energy efficiency of dwellings owned or occupied by low-income persons, reduce their total residential energy expenditures, and improve their health and safety, especially low-income persons who are particularly vulnerable such as the elderly, persons with disabilities, families with children, high residential energy users, and households with high energy burden."

As evidence, GLCAP has received and continues to receive many thank you letters from families to whom we have provided weatherization assistance services. These letters typically state how thankful they are for the services we provided and often list many of the benefits mentioned above in the enabling legislation. The following quote was taken from a letter received from a family that had received weatherization services from our organization. "My family and I just wanted to express our thanks and gratitude for the weatherization of our home....Being that my house is 101 years old it was definitely in dire need of having the insulation updated and without the help that your program gave us I would never have been able to afford having it done. Because of all the improvements made to my home not only will my utility bills be more manageable but my family will be able to greatly benefit from the home staying warmer in the winter and cooler in the summer." The homeowner goes on to state that she is also "grateful for the exceptional work" that was performed on the home. This is just one example of the many letters we receive. Many times folks are forced to make difficult choices between paying high utility bills or purchasing food, needed healthcare services and prescription medications. This program reduces the burden of those choices.

Leveraging other funding resources with DOE WAP

It is our mission to provide our communities and families with the best possible assistance available. Though the weatherization program has much to offer, it does have limitations. In many cases, leaking roofs, structural deficiencies, electrical issues, etc. could result in an “unable to assist” situation, leaving the home ineligible for weatherization services. This is not the most desirable end result. As the housing stock continues to age, the need for additional assistance to address the physical challenges of the homes continues to increase.

To help combat these “not able to assist” situations, GLCAP administers other utility funded energy programs and several other housing rehabilitation/repair initiatives. Funding for these programs originates from the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the State of Ohio and regulated electric and natural gas utility companies. Leveraging these programs in combination with the weatherization program allows us to take a whole house approach to our work and helps alleviate those “not able to assist” situations. Blending leveraged resources creates an opportunity to repair and rehabilitate these deficient homes, making them weatherization ready and resulting in a safe, energy efficient home for the client. GLCAP also makes a concerted effort to administer the weatherization program in combination with available resources offered by other agencies in the area. In PY2017, GLCAP was able to combine at least one or more leveraged resources on over 80% of the total units weatherized. The remaining 20% of the homes tend to be located in more rural areas that depend on bulk fuel utilities such as propane, fuel oil and electricity from municipalities that do not offer energy efficiency programs.

Success story illustrating the benefits of leveraging multiple resources on a home:

GLCAP completed a large project that illustrates the power of leveraging multiple funding streams on one home. The home was very large, built around the turn of the last century, had twelve foot ceilings, a spiral staircase and was in very bad condition. A young family of six lived in the home, with one of the children being under the age of six. Peeling lead based paint inside and out gave concern to the youngest child’s health and safety. There was no insulation in the home, major roof issues were evident, and unsafe electrical wiring pushed this home way beyond the financial capabilities of any one program. The family qualified for eight of our housing and energy programs that were offered at the time. Each of the eight programs were dependent on the other to make this a viable project. These include; Home Weatherization Assistance Program, Community Housing Impact and Preservation, Columbia Gas of Ohio WarmChoice Program, Ohio Housing Trust Fund, American Electric Power CAP, Ohio Lead Hazard Control Grant and Lead Safe Families Grant. Any one of the programs could not have been accessed, the home would have become an “unable to assist” situation and the family would not have received assistance of any kind. As a result, the project was a success and all deficiencies were corrected and weatherization services were able to be provided. One year later

we contacted the homeowner to determine the energy savings they had realized. In just one year, the family saved over \$800 from reduced gas and electric consumption.

Challenges of administering the DOE WAP:

I am responsible for the budgets for the programs listed above and I need to tell you that I do not have enough money for administration. The big cost in weatherization used to be materials, but savings now is really dependent on highly trained installers and administrative staff. I need to be able to pay people so I can keep them, but I'm also a business – a nonprofit but still a business. An extra 5% would solve a wealth of problems and make sure we weatherize as many units as we can as well as we can.

Program eligibility determination policies and procedures should be aligned for low income programs. Currently, most funders have their own unique way of determining eligibility. Having one common eligibility determination procedure for all programs would not only make it simpler and less frustrating for the families we serve, but for the sub-grantee as well. This is one of the biggest hurdles we face when attempting to leverage multiple funding sources together on a project. If funders could agree on one common application, one common method of calculating income and common poverty income guidelines to follow, the programs and services would be streamlined for the families and the sub-grantees.

Congress has spent a lot of money building a trained national network to deliver WAP, and now a lot of utility and state programs that we coordinate. After Congress criticized WAP for shoddy work during the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act, DOE and the network came up with the Quality Work Plan. It looks a lot like the training and standards we had developed on our own in Ohio. We have had a good training center for over 30 years, and we needed it to meet the new requirements. I can safely say I have some of the best trained people you can find, who care about the families they serve.

Conclusion:

I would like to thank the committee once again and encourage your continued support for the DOE WAP. This program has helped thousands of families for 40+ years and the need for this service continues in our communities and across the nation. As our housing stock continues to age, so does the need for increased WAP services and funding. I hope my testimony provides you with a unique perspective on managing a weatherization program at the local level.

Respectfully submitted,

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