

**The Honorable Glenn “GT” Thompson**  
**(PA-15)**  
**Testimony before the House Committee on Education and Labor**  
**Member Day Hearing on Priorities in the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress**  
**Thursday, March 14, 2019**  
**The Honorable Glenn “GT” Thompson**

Chairman Scott, Ranking Member Foxx, and Members of the House Committee on Education and Labor:

Good morning and thank you for providing the opportunity to share my priorities for the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress. As a member of the committee, I have served in this capacity since first being elected in 2009. While the majority and minority have changed hands twice since that time, I have been steadfast in my commitment to provide honest input to the process. While we do not always agree upon every issue, there are many areas where we can continue to build consensus to support programs that will improve lives and shape futures. Primarily among these areas of consensus is a dedication to strengthen the workforce and provide American’s of all ages opportunities to achieve their life’s full potential.

**Career and Technical Education:**

As Co-Chair of the bipartisan House Career and Technical Education Caucus, I strongly support CTE programs that provide learners of all ages with career-ready skills. From agriculture to marketing and manufacturing: CTE programs work to develop America’s most valuable resource – its people.

As this Committee knows, CTE is taught in a range of settings: from high schools and area technical centers to technical and two-year community colleges. In total, 12.5 million high school and college students are enrolled in CTE programs.

The Trump Administration has also made a strong commitment to CTE. During President Trump’s first State of the Union Address, he said “Let us invest in workforce development and job training. Let us open great vocational schools so our future workers can learn a craft and realize their full potential.”

Fortunately, the 115<sup>th</sup> Congress unanimously passed the first major overhaul to the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical since 2006, *the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act*. While I was an original sponsor of this bill, the process and a bipartisan commitment to doing what is right for the American worker and American businesses prevailed. This couldn’t have been done without many of my colleagues who are sitting in this hearing room. The bill was signed into law by President Trump in July 2018, and it aims to close the skills gap by modernizing the federal investment in CTE programs and connecting educators with industry stakeholders.

The Perkins Act is important for educational institutions as well as local businesses. Small business owners rely upon Perkins programs to increase the number of skilled candidates in emerging sectors.

CTE has established itself as a path that many high-achieving students choose in pursuit of industry certifications and hands-on skills they can use right out of high school, in skills-based education programs, or in college.

By modernizing the federal investment in CTE programs we are able to connect more educators with industry stakeholders and close the skills gap that in this country. There are more than 7 million vacant jobs out there right now, and CTE programs will give Americans the skills to fill them.

As states begin transitioning to meet the new federal requirements, it is paramount that we remain vigilant and ensure this legislation is implemented with the intentions of Congress. Future workers in fields such as manufacturing, information technology, healthcare, and agriculture will rely upon career and technical programs to obtain the skills necessary for high-skill, high-wage, family-sustaining careers. We, as a Country, must ensure we are providing the education and the tools to equip a 21st Century workforce and this committee should provide adequate oversight of the law's implementation.

### **Child Nutrition:**

Nutritious meals play an important role in the academic outcomes of students. Federal child nutrition programs help provide low-income students and families access to those nutritious meals. Unfortunately, over the last several years, a wave of onerous federal regulations has limited the effectiveness of these programs at the local level.

Generally, child nutrition programs provide assistance to states, schools, and other institutions to serve meals and snacks outside of the home through cash assistance, commodity food, and administrative support. The federal involvement in child nutrition programs dates back to passage of the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act in 1946, which created the National School Lunch Program.

As this Committee knows, Congress passed *the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act in 2010*, which amended nutrition standards in the School Lunch Program. Among the changes, the law mandated that flavored milk must be low-fat within the program. This law, along with lower participation in the program, led to an alarming decline in milk consumption in schools since 2010.

Milk is the No. 1 source of nine essential nutrients in young Americans' diets, and provides multiple health benefits, including better bone health, lower blood pressure, and reduced risk of cardiovascular disease or Type 2 diabetes. Milk is a source of three out of four under-consumed nutrients – calcium, potassium, and vitamin D. No other beverage naturally comes close to this level of nutritional value.

From 2014 to 2016, schools served 213 million fewer half-pints of milk, despite the fact that public school enrollment was growing. Children over four-years-old are not meeting the recommended daily servings of dairy in the Dietary Guidelines of America. Given the nutritional value of milk, and the fact that young minds need to be well nourished to perform at their best, this is cause for concern.

Moreover, a number of comprehensive scientific reviews have shown that dairy foods have a neutral association with cardiovascular health, regardless of the fat content. The dean of the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University, who is also a cardiologist, wrote: “No long-term studies support harms, and emerging evidence suggests some potential benefits, of dairy fat or high-fat dairy foods.” He added that there is little support for the prevailing recommendations for dairy intake that emphasize low-fat dairy.

To combat this decline in consumption of dairy, the USDA announced a rule in May of 2017 that allowed schools to receive waivers for low-fat (1%) flavored milk, rather than only fat-free. While this is a step in the right direction, we must do more to ensure schools have the flexibility to increase availability of milk choices.

Congress should work with the states to provide greater flexibility to school districts working to provide their students with healthy meals they will enjoy. This will help to eliminate food waste, lower program costs, preserve taxpayer dollars, and ensure that students have access to healthy meals they will actually eat.

### **Community Services Block Grant Reauthorization:**

The Community Services Block Grant traces its roots to the War on Poverty, launched by President Lyndon Johnson more than 50 years ago when he proposed the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. In his March 1964 message to Congress, President Johnson said the act would “give every American community the opportunity to develop a comprehensive plan to fight its own poverty—and help them to carry out their plans.”

This was to be achieved through a new Community Action Program, which established local Community Action Agencies. The program guides local residents to identify unique barriers and unmet needs contributing to poverty in their individual communities and develop plans to address those needs, drawing on resources from all levels of government and the private sector.

Virtually every county in the United States has a Community Action Agency, a local organization charged by the federal government with the sweeping mission of fighting poverty. About 1,000 such agencies exist nationwide. They help ensure a safety net for low-income individuals and families, but even more importantly, they create opportunities for people to move from poverty to independence. CAAs address local causes and conditions of poverty with input from the entire community, including the low-income people they serve.

The Community Services Block Grant is the only federal program with the explicit and overarching goal of reducing poverty, regardless of its cause. The CSBG pursues this goal by providing critical funding to the nationwide network of local CAAs and supporting their locally-

driven comprehensive approach to fighting poverty. The federal government allots block grants to states, and states retain a small portion for oversight, monitoring, technical assistance, and statewide initiatives. The majority of funds – at least 90 percent of each state’s allotment – must be passed through to local agencies.

In Fiscal Year 2017, CSBG received an appropriation of \$715 million. Based on the most recent data from FY2015, funding of the CSBG has allowed for the following:

- 1,026 local agencies were designated as eligible entities in 50 states, DC, and Puerto Rico allowing for 99 percent of American counties were served;
- Resources administered by the CSBG network totaled \$13.8 billion, including \$637 million in CSBG funds allocated directly to local agencies;
- For each \$1 of CSBG funds allocated directly to local agencies, the network leveraged an additional \$21 in combined federal, state, local, and private resources; and
- Local agencies served almost 16 million individuals in almost 7 million families, most with incomes below 125 percent of the poverty line and nearly a third with incomes below 50 percent of the poverty line.

Unfortunately, reauthorization of this program has not taken place in more than 20 years. That is why Rep. Betty McCollum and I have just introduced H.R. 1695, the Community Services Block Grant Reauthorization Act of 2019. The bill aims to preserve and strengthen the core principles that have made Community Action unique for more than 50 years, which simultaneously enhancing transparency for program integrity. Furthermore, H.R. 1695 will reinforce and expand existing efforts to continuously improve the performance and management of Community Action at all levels of government, and invigorate the historic commitment to innovation and evidence-based practice to ensure measureable results in reducing poverty.

Funds for this program help families and individuals achieve self-sufficiency, find and retain meaningful employment, attain an adequate education, make better use of available income, obtain adequate housing, and achieve greater participation in community affairs. It is time for Congress to renew our Nation’s commitment to reducing poverty by reauthorization the CSBG.

Thank you to Chairman Scott, Ranking Member Foxx, and Members of this Committee for allowing me to express my priorities for this Committee in the 116th Congress. I appreciate your consideration and look forward to working together on these and other issues.