

**Remarks by Congresswoman Betty McCollum
National Community Action Foundation Legislative Conference
March 16, 2016**

Good afternoon! I am thrilled to be with you today.

The first and most important thing I need to say today is ... thank you! Thank you for your work. Thank you for making a difference in the lives of our fellow citizens. Thank you for being community leaders and change agents. Not only am I appreciative, I am grateful for your work because it makes our communities and our country stronger.

With us today is a man who is the face of Community Action in Washington – and he works tirelessly for you. David Bradley is a trusted friend of mine. He is passionate about the work he does for you. He is a friend to Democrats, Republicans, and anyone else who has 5 minutes to hear about fighting poverty and creating opportunity. I do think David travels too much and he works too hard, so you all need to tell him to slow down because he won't listen to me!

As you all know, the Community Services Block Grant was funded this year at \$715 million – a \$41 million increase over FY2015. In this very, very tough budget environment that funding increase was no miracle, it was a very heavy lift by folks who know the valuable and important work you are doing!

So let's give credit where it is due. Thank you David Bradley! Thank you Congressman Tom Cole, my good friend from Oklahoma! Thank you Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro!

Now, as we look to the 2017 budget – let's sustain that funding increase. And you know you have my full support!

This is an important presidential election year which results in very low expectations for Congress to move a lot of legislation. And, even though I hope there will be a new Speaker next year, I nonetheless want Speaker Paul Ryan and this Congress to be successful because I want our country and the American people to be successful. Speaker Ryan is a good man and I know, in his own way, he is committed to fighting poverty.

It is my hope Republicans and Democrats, the House and Senate, can unite behind a bill that is bipartisan with 93 co-sponsors, is non-controversial, and will modernize one of our country's most important and successful anti-poverty programs.

So, I want to urge Speaker Ryan and House leadership to move forward and bring H.R. 1655 to the floor so we can pass the *Community Economic Opportunity Act of 2015* ... and help our Community Action agencies be even more effective in meeting the needs of people who are seeking a better future for themselves and their families.

We have terrific Community Action agencies in Minnesota and I want thank all the agencies for their hard work. My good friend Clarence Hightower and his team do a tremendous job in Ramsey and Washington counties and I am deeply grateful for their work. I have seen firsthand the difference they are making for our children, families, and seniors. I know it is what all of you in this room do every day and again let me say thank you!

Let me briefly give you my thoughts on why your work is more important today than ever before.

I don't want this to be a political speech, but something has happened in our country over the past six months with regard to political discourse that is profoundly disturbing and increasingly dangerous.

Politics at times can be harsh, heated and even mean. But never, never, never should the political process in the world's greatest, most diverse democracy be used to scapegoat people based on ethnicity, target people based on religion, demean people based on race, or promote violence against people of opposing views.

We are one country united in our diversity and bound together by a shared commitment to common values. The diversity and values we treasure as a nation are reflected directly in the work of Community Action.

Whether it is in a rural area, a suburb, or the largest American cities – the American people can only be successful if we respect the essential humanity and dignity in each of our neighbors – the neighbors we know and the neighbors we don't know. I know that kind of respect is the essence of what you do every day.

We should never expect less from a candidate for president.

As you know, I am not talking about Republican or Democratic values. I am talking about American values – a fundamental code of civil conduct that must never be betrayed – especially by people seeking the most powerful and important job in the world.

The American people need to hold elected officials and those seeking elected office accountable and to a high standard. You know this because we hold your agencies to high standards ... and you meet and often exceed those standards.

It is my hope that at the end of the day the American people – all of us – will make choices in November that reflect the highest and best of our spirit as Americans. But we've got some work to do!

Thank you for your work. It is tremendously important. You have my full support and commitment to keep fighting for Community Action, the people you serve, and for you!

Thank you!

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