

Written testimony for the Committee on Education and the Workforce

Presented 07.25.18 by Dan Jurman, CEO, Community Action Partnership

If there truly has been a war on poverty for over fifty years, then I would argue that the best we've been able to do is continue a slowly deteriorating holding action. Poverty is a complex and insidious condition that perpetuates itself when we allow it to. When nonprofit organizations fight it by only treating its symptoms, working in silos, or, worse yet, as disorganized competitors, then we are doomed to fail. If we are going to win this war, then our solutions must not only be focused on core causes, they must also be as complex as the problem they seek to solve, and include deep, collaborative partnerships between nonprofits, government and business at the local level, as well as the most important partner of all - the people living in poverty themselves. That's exactly what we're trying to do in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

Lancaster County is a thriving community, rich with economic development and strong for-profit, non-profit, healthcare and education sectors. But despite unprecedented growth, our county is home to a troubling poverty rate of nearly 11 percent, with a rate of 29.2 percent in Lancaster City, a higher rate than either Philadelphia or Pittsburgh. In the south side of our city, the rate is 40%, the same as Detroit. Because of the steady growth of poverty over the past decade, and as the county's largest anti-poverty organization, serving more than 40,000 individuals each year, the Community Action Partnership of Lancaster County has chosen innovation and unprecedented collaboration as our way forward. Here are a few examples.

Empower Lancaster is a universal social services database currently being shared among 40 Lancaster County organizations, and growing. We understand this to be a first-in-the-nation initiative, where we're taking a no-wrong-door approach to social services, with streamlined universal intake and a standard evaluation to assess an individual's strengths and areas for goal-oriented growth. This revolutionary innovation will allow our community to track – in real-time – progress towards self-sufficiency and the combination of services helping to move the needle, which will then allow us to better allocate funds as a community. It will also seamlessly connect individuals to the other supports for which they may be eligible, saving time and needless duplication of efforts.

In Lancaster County, 48 percent of families in poverty are headed by a single mother. Often these mothers can't afford to stop earning a bad paycheck in order to pursue a better one. They're trapped. In an effort to assist single moms working in jobs with low pay or low opportunity for advancement, we are launching a pilot to provide long-term case management and life stipends to bridge the financial gap while these women obtain training or wait for their first paycheck. This not only allows them to overcome the uncertainty of the unknown, but it also provides skilled workers to our county's employers who list available workforce as their number one concern.

We've also formed our own construction company, hiring people with barriers to employment, especially a criminal record, and paying them a living wage to learn to turn

blighted and condemned housing into beautiful homes that are then sold to low to moderate income first time home buyers. It's a partnership between CAP, the Lancaster Housing Opportunity Partnership, the City and our County Redevelopment Authority. This initiative, which won the 2017 US Conference of Mayors Community WINS Award, is now poised to start tackling Lancaster's lead paint crisis as well.

And finally: innovation in a legacy program. Each year, CAP serves more than 700 children in early education. As we study 21st century careers, we increasingly see the need for skills in science, technology, engineering and math. And while K-through-12 schools have done a good job integrating STEM into curriculum, STEM has not been as much of a focus for early learning programs. That's why this fall, CAP, in partnership with Millersville University, will debut Central Pennsylvania's first pre-K STEM classroom. While the classroom instruction will happen with federal Head Start dollars, the funding for the renovations, furnishings and curriculum has come from private funders, leveraging both for greater outcomes.

The last significant drop in poverty came after World War Two. The availability of living wage jobs and the GI Bill were engines that built a middle class that made us the envy of the world. Now, with baby boomers retiring at levels we've never experienced before, leaving open a record number of living wage jobs that don't require a four-year college degree, we have an unprecedented opportunity to once again make real strides in reducing poverty. We must meet this moment in history with innovation that quickly connects people in need with opportunities that will change not only their lives, but the lives of their children as well. The interests of local government, businesses, the nonprofit sector and the people we serve are more aligned and more urgent than ever. We have only to seize this opportunity before it passes. Ladies and gentlemen of the committee, we can win this war, but only if we're dedicated to winning it together. Thank you.