

Casey urges increased funding for CDBG program

By Christine Haines chaines@heraldstandard.com | Posted: Wednesday, April 2, 2014
3:45 pm

U.S. Sen. Bob Casey, D-Pa., is asking his fellow senators to consider adding funds to the Community Development Block Grant program for the 2015 budget.

Casey's letter to the Senate Appropriations committee and members of the Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development came after President Barack Obama proposed reducing the program by more than \$200 million for the next fiscal year.

Casey noted that nationally there has been a cut of \$920 million in the CDBG appropriation over the past four years, with a cut of \$65 million just in Pennsylvania.

"It has not helped the state in any way," Casey said. "It doesn't make sense when a program works well for communities and allows communities at the local level to decide what to do with dollars and what the priorities are, as opposed to one size fits all from Washington. The Obama administration's proposal to fund CDBG at \$2.8 billion will cause further cuts to the program."

Fayette County gets its federal CDBG money through the state, with Uniontown and Connellsville receiving \$300,000 each and the Fayette County Redevelopment Authority getting another \$1 million that is given out to various townships and boroughs.

The money is used for road projects, housing rehabilitation, blight reduction and infrastructure improvements. Uniontown and Connellsville also have been using the money to fund the purchase of fire trucks.

Michael Edwards, executive director of the Connellsville Redevelopment Authority, said that in the past the city received as much as \$700,000. The \$300,000 it now gets is the minimum allowed by state law for cities. Edwards said the program has seen a 25 percent reduction since 2010, though there was a slight increase of just over 1 percent last year. How much the city receives influences what can be done, as shown by past projects.

"We developed parks and senior centers," Edwards said. "The cuts do affect what projects are carried on in the city."

There are no other funding options for many of the programs supported by the CDBG program, Casey said.

"One hundred thousand or \$200,000 for a particular community or \$500,000 doesn't seem like a

lot, but it's a real important part of their budget," Casey said. "Fayette County's unfortunately been in among the highest counties in the state when it comes to poverty, so these are essential programs for communities in Fayette County."