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PCSW Urges Ratification of CEDAW

*U.N. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
Called Critical to Women's Economic Security, Health & Safety, and Opportunity*

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HARTFORD -- The Connecticut General Assembly's Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW) today called upon Congress to ratify the United Nations' international treaty to eliminate discrimination against women. Considered an international Women's Bill of Rights, the U.N. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, better known as CEDAW, will soon be the subject of a U.S. Senate Foreign Relations sub-committee hearing led by Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Cal.)

Although CEDAW was formally adopted by the U.N. during the Carter Administration, the United States remains one of only eight countries that have not formally adopted it.

"We're proud that the Connecticut Senate long ago endorsed ratification and has long been supportive of it, but the fact that the United States has, for more than 20 years, failed to recognize the only comprehensive international treaty designed to prevent gender discrimination is absolutely indefensible," said Teresa C. Younger, PCSW executive director. "Our failure to ratify puts us in league with Iran, Sudan, Somalia and only four other countries. If women's rights are not ensured, human rights are not ensured, and so the United States' inaction on CEDAW makes it hard to defend America's reputation as a world leader in human rights."

CEDAW defines discrimination against women as "...any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field." Countries that accept CEDAW agree to: incorporate into their legal system the principle that men and women are equal; abolish discriminatory laws and write into law measures to prohibit gender discrimination; and ensure equal access for women to political service, representation, education, employment and health. Furthermore, it affirms a woman's right to retain or to change her nationality and requires that signatory countries prohibit human trafficking. CEDAW is the only human rights treaty that recognizes women's reproductive rights.

“Failure to ratify is inconsistent with U.S. foreign policy, which recognizes many human rights treaties, including those concerning genocide, racism, torture and child labor,” said Younger. “Civil societies around the world have reached consensus on CEDAW, and it is high time America did, too. PCSW recognizes CEDAW as fundamental to shaping public policy that expands the rights of women in a time when women’s economic security, health and safety are being eroded. CEDAW provides an internationally recognized framework for eliminating gender discrimination across a spectrum that includes education, healthcare, labor, family relations and political service.”

Younger lauded Boxer for asking that the Senate consider CEDAW as it was originally drafted, without the so-called RUDs (for reservations, understanding and declarations) which have been added over time and which considerably limit the declaration’s authority in the area of reproductive health and maternity leave.

About the PCSW: The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women was formed in 1973 under Sec. 46a of the Connecticut General Statutes to study “all matters concerning women, and in furtherance of that responsibility shall: (a) inform leaders of business, education, State and local governments and the communications media of the nature and scope of the problem of sex discrimination, with a view to enlisting their support in working toward improvement; (b) serve as a liaison between government and private interest groups concerned with services for women; (c) promote consideration of qualified women for all levels of government positions; (d) oversee coordination and assess programs and practices in all State agencies as they affect women.”