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PCSW Calls Upon Obama to Make Women Key Part of Economic Stimulus Plan

*State Agency Adds Voice to National Coalition to Ensure Equality;
President-Elect Responds*

HARTFORD – The Connecticut General Assembly’s Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW) has joined with 150 influential women’s, community and labor organizations in calling upon President-Elect Obama to make sure women have fair access to job opportunities created through his economic recovery plan.

In a letter dated Dec. 18, 2008, the groups, convened by the Washington-based Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW) and ranging from the American Association of University Women (AAUW) to local YWCAs, urge Obama to “ensure that the economic recovery legislation benefits all Americans.” It asks Obama to take “positive steps to eliminate the workforce segregation that exists today in many of the infrastructure and ‘green’ jobs” expected to be funded through his overarching stimulus package.

On Monday, the Obama transition team said it would create the “White House Task Force on Working Families,” a major initiative aimed at raising working Americans’ standard of living.

“For 35 years, the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women has worked on issues that affect women across the span of their lives, so it’s refreshing to see these urgent issues addressed on a national level,” said Teresa C. Younger, executive director of PCSW. “In recognizing the importance of support for working families, Mr. Obama is acknowledging the key role women play in building the middle class. The Task Force is quite right in tackling head-on the issues women face each day: work and family balance; education and training opportunities; restoring standards, safety and equity in the workplace; creating jobs that pay a living wage; and protecting Social Security, which systematically puts women at a disadvantage.”

Younger says the national initiative will directly affect Connecticut workers through the list of “shovel-ready” projects being prepared by the office of Gov. M. Jodi Rell. In a letter dated Dec. 17, 2008, Rell asked municipal leaders across the state to identify projects that qualify for the federal stimulus plan, saying “they must be fully designed; they must be fully permitted (that is, not only have all local, state and federal approvals but also have all required studies from agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, etc.); and they must be ready to begin actual construction within 180 days of the allocation of funding.”

On both a state and national level, women should have access to the construction and green technology jobs created through the plan, said Younger.

“Women continue to be an untapped resource in the engine driving our State and our nation’s economy, and this simply has to change,” she said. “Dating back as far as the Carter Administration, women’s groups have called upon the federal government to make sure women are part of economic development solutions. Women make up 47 percent of the total labor force, but only 3.5 percent of construction, extraction, maintenance, and repair workers.

“Now that the new administration is taking a hard look at infrastructure jobs and greener technologies as a lynchpin of its economic stimulus plan, it’s imperative that women be included at that table. Those jobs pay a living wage, have good benefits and go a long way in ensuring a family’s economic self-sufficiency.

“We applaud the new Task Force on Working Families as an excellent first step and will continue to call upon the President-Elect to work with State governments to make sure all policies governing the nation’s economic stimulus package recognize women’s economic parity as essential to growing the American middle class and getting the country back on its feet.”