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Testimony of
Patricia Russo, Honorary Commissioner
Teresa Younger, Executive Director
Permanent Commission on the Status of Women
Before the
Appropriations Committee
Wednesday, February 11, 2009

Re: The FY 2010/11 Budget for the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women in H.B. 6365, AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2011.

Good Evening Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian and members of the Appropriations Committee. I am Pat Russo, past chair and honorary Commissioner of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women. On behalf of myself and our Executive Director, Teresa Younger, it is an honor to testify before you in support of our agency and against the Governor's recommendation to eliminate the Commission. We understand, as well as anyone, the challenging times the State is facing.

PCSW has been bringing the voices of women to the State Capitol for over thirty-five years, and through all of that time, we've been at the forefront of continuing progress for women in our state. PCSW is the only nonpartisan comprehensive state institution that evaluates laws and policies for their impact on the lives of women. Our job is to provide information, analysis, and assistance to the General Assembly, State agencies, state leaders and the public on all matters concerning women. We represent a small investment that produces a sizeable and valuable return. Because of the work of the PCSW, our state government has been better equipped to address the needs of working parents, victims of sexual harassment, women with health care concerns such as breast cancer and osteoporosis, women business owners, parents seeking child support, women leaving welfare for work, childcare workers, and women entering nontraditional occupations. Because of the work of the PCSW our state has been recognized as a national leader on the issues of women's economic security, health and safety and gender discrimination, battles still faced by women today.

Our budget, post recent rescissions, is just over one million dollars, which is about 77 cents for each of Connecticut's 1,399,625 women over the age of 18. This doesn't even include the next generation of women who will work, pay taxes, raise families or vote in Connecticut. Some would argue, I would argue, that this is a worthy investment of "the people's money." I have watched as the PCSW changes with the needs of our community.

Our statutory mandate requires us, among other duties, to "...serve as a liaison between government and private interest groups concerned with services for women..." [C.G.S. 46a-4(b)], and we often think of ourselves as a gateway for the concerns of different populations of women across the state. We have over the years convened a variety of groups in order to bring issues to state government; the PCSW currently convenes the *Connecticut Women's Health Campaign*, a statewide coalition of experts and advocates working together to improve health care for women and girls; the *Young Women's Leadership Program*, which highlights the concerns of women ages 18-35 years; and the *Women In the Trades Exchange*, to increase opportunities for women in the skilled trades and technical careers. Additionally, we also go to where the women are and last year held three public hearings that gave voice to women throughout the state by highlighting their concerns under the topic of financial security.

Our budget represents the type of State spending that saves money in the long run. For example, over the past ten years, the PCSW has provided Sexual Harassment Awareness and Prevention Training to nearly 10,000 state employees in agencies such as the Banking Department, Connecticut State University System Central Office, the Department of Revenue Services, the Department of Correction, the Office of the Attorney General and Legislative Management. *No fee is charged to these agencies.* Without the training services provided by the PCSW, state agencies would have to pay between \$400-\$600 for a two-hour sexual harassment training session required by law for all supervisors.

Prevention is the key to State savings and many of our responsibilities are on-going because change takes time. For example, we continue to work with the Department of Correction (DOC) to reduce sexual harassment against employees. In an ongoing agreement with the DOC, the PCSW has retained former superior court judge Beverly Hodgson, to serve as Sexual Harassment Consultant to monitor all investigations and resolutions of sexual harassment and retaliation claims, and to assist the Department in improving its policies and procedures.

In these ever changing times we have moved forward and highlighted difficult issues such as the problem of human trafficking. As the convening agency of the Trafficking in Persons Council, we have worked with Senator Stillman and the Council members issuing reports, and proposing legislation that provides victims services and enhances training and services for victims.

We continue to work closely with the Office of Workforce Competitiveness (OWC) on the Career Ladders Advisory Council. Jointly we oversaw the allocation of funds for pilot projects to enhance education and career opportunities for workers in the childcare, healthcare and technology fields. We addressed the issues of building the ladders to move our residents to higher levels of self-sufficiency.

We are a resource to the public through the information and referral service we provide. We respond to nearly 500 calls per year from individuals seeking information about state laws and services, and in 2008, staff and Commissioners spoke at nearly 100 events sponsored by groups ranging from the AAUW Statewide, to the Hartford Business Journal, to the UCONN School of Social Work, to Women and Girls Fund of New Haven. We sent out over 6,000 publications and our website was visited almost 65,000 times during the year.

We work diligently to promote women in leadership roles. In fact, last year a record number of women, 102, ran for elected office. We were pleased to see this increase and continue to promote women in a variety of roles. However, it should be noted that women make up 51% of the total population and a little over 30% of the General Assembly. But having women in the General Assembly is not the only place where leadership is needed. We maintain a "Talent Bank" of women interested in serving on State boards and commissions. In 2008, there were over 400 women listed in our Talent Bank. We are truly pleased that the talent bank is now completely searchable electronically by appointing authorities.

In order to provide you with accurate research and analysis we released several publications last year and among them was *Getting to a Better Tomorrow: Economic and Financial Security*. The gathering of this information gives a greater understanding of the women we represent, the challenges they face and the policy initiatives we need to move us all forward. As a continuation of our commitment to providing original research, next month we will be releasing the *Elder Economic Standard Index*, in conjunction with the Commission on Aging. This report will highlight the cost of living in Connecticut for those citizens over 65 years of age.

Women are the key to economic development and security and while we have made a great deal of progress, we are not fully equal yet, and there is still much work to be done. While Connecticut ranks first in the nation in individual earnings, we rank 40th in terms of the wage gap between women and men. Women are still victims of domestic violence and sexual assault; childcare workers are still paid far less than truck drivers; and women are still far more likely than men to be poor as they grow old.

Who knows where the women and their families of Connecticut would be without the PCSW? For thirty-five years we have been the state's leading force for women's equality. We have been there through so much; legislation prohibiting sex discrimination in credit transactions; laws enacted to protect pregnant workers; legislation defining and prohibiting sexual harassment; the first family and medical leave protections in the country; legislation requiring insurance programs to provide coverage for a minimum of 48 hours following a mastectomy; legislation requiring health insurance plans to cover a minimum of 48 hours' hospital stay for normal childbirth and 96 hours for Caesarian sections; laws improving the education and compensation of early childhood education professionals; development of Care4Kids programs; establishment of the HUSKY programs; and the list goes on.

At the PCSW, we are working not just for today but for the next generation so they can grow up in a world where full social, political, and economic equality is possible for everyone. We bring you the analysis, the information, the voices, and the testimonials that assist you in your efforts to build that world. Our budget represents a small investment to achieve an important and valuable goal. Now more than ever the women and families of Connecticut need the leadership we provide and our voice on the policies that affect their lives.

Thank you.

