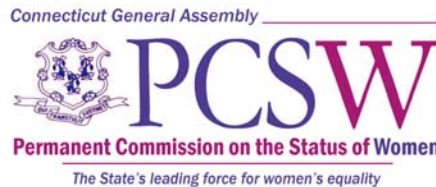


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**Testimony of
Natasha M. Pierre, JD, MSW
Legislative Director
The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women
Before the
Judiciary Committee
Thursday, March 26, 2009**

In Support of:

S.B. 127, AAC The Collection of Child Activity Fees Pursuant to a Support Order

H.B. 6245, AAC the Recommendations of the Task Force on Domestic Violence in Immigrant Communities

Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor and members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony in support of S.B. 127, AAC The Collection of Child Activity Fees Pursuant to a Support Order and H.B. 6245, AAC the Recommendations of the Task Force on Domestic Violence in Immigrant Communities.

H.B. 6245, AAC the Recommendations of the Task Force on Domestic Violence in Immigrant Communities

I represent PCSW on the Task Force on Domestic Violence in Immigrant communities. Victims of domestic violence are always torn between protecting themselves and their children by leaving or reporting an abusive relationship; or maintaining their family unit in spite of the violence. Immigrant victims' choices are further compounded by the fact that their immigration status could be jeopardized. Therefore, it is important that the special concerns of immigrant victims of domestic violence be addressed and this bill would address it by:

- Requiring uniform protocols for treating victims of family violence whose immigration status is questionable (Section 1(d) and (g)).

- Designating an officer to obtain and maintain certification from a federal agency that would enable the officer to provide a “certification of helplessness,” which is needed for a victim to obtain an immigration status independent of the abuser (Section 1(e)).
- Requiring trainings on the impact of dual arrests on immigrant victims (Section 1(f)).
- Requiring the assignment of at least one full-time victim advocate to each courthouse with a domestic violence docket (Section 3).
- Providing funding to the Judicial Department and legal services to assist victims during the legal process (Sections 6-7 and 11).
- Continuing the work of the taskforce to further explore and make recommendations on issues that were raised this year (Section 4).

PCSW, the Connecticut Women’s Health Campaign and the Young Women’s Leadership Program support section 5 of this bill, which would provide funding for 24-7 on-site staffing at emergency shelters. Domestic violence advocates have been seeking this funding for several years, and will need it even more to meet the needs of immigrant victims.

Currently there are 18 domestic violence programs throughout the state that provide hotline, shelter, criminal court based, police department, and community education services. In FY 2006, they provided services to 53,006 victims of domestic violence.

Domestic violence is an on-going problem – we cannot predict when or where it will occur. When a victim seeks help to escape a violent situation it must be immediately provided. However, only three programs have 24- hour staff, and may not have the ability to shelter someone due to lack of space. Women and children are left alone at the shelters at night when they are most vulnerable; they do not have an advocate present to support and comfort them during a traumatic time in their lives. This lack of support makes it more likely that a victim would return to her abuser. It is imperative that domestic violence victims receive help when they reach out for it, and this bill would provide more services to do so.

S.B. 127, AAC The Collection of Child Activity Fees Pursuant to a Support Order

PCSW supports passage of S.B. 127, which would allow child support orders to include child athletic, extracurricular or other activity fees. Research shows that 5 of every 6 custodial parents are women (83.8 percent) and 1 in 6 are men (16.2%).¹ In the U.S. in 2005:²

- Child support collections totaled \$25 billion.
- 6.1 million custodial mothers were entitled to child support.
- The annual average amount of child support received was \$3,600, which was 64% of the average amount due (\$5,600).
- For 5.3 million custodial parents who received a portion of the child support owed, the payment represented 16% of their average income.
- Among custodial parents below the poverty level who received full payments, the payment represented 60% of their average income.

For all custodial parents, especially those living below the poverty line, child support payments are a critical component toward reaching economic self sufficiency. Nearly half of all single mothers lack adequate income and are much more likely to be poor than other families with children. Additionally, households headed by women of color have the highest rates of income inadequacy: 80% for Latinas, 69% percent for African-Americans, 43% for Asian/Pacific Islanders, compared to 45% for Caucasians.

Currently the law provides for payment for childcare that is necessary to allow a parent to maintain employment. It does not provide for child athletic, extracurricular or other activity fees. When child activity fees are added to the equation, the cost may be out of reach for custodial parents, which may mean that the child is not involved in extracurricular activities.

It has been recognized that extracurricular activities have a positive influence on children:³

- Studies have found that adolescents who participate in extracurricular activities—sports, arts, clubs, and others—have higher grades, higher academic aspirations, and better

¹ U.S. Census Bureau. <<http://www.census.gov/prod/2007pubs/p60-234.pdf>>.

² U.S. Census Bureau. <<http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/children/010634.html>>.

³ National Women's Sports Foundation.

attitudes toward school and education. On a psychological level, they are more likely to have a positive self image, less inclined to depression, and less likely to have suicidal tendencies. Physically, they are more likely to get proper exercise and eat healthy—even if their extracurricular activity doesn't include sports.

- A study by the National Center for Education Statistics found participants in extracurricular activities were 20% more likely to attain a bachelor's degree or higher.
- For many U.S. children, athletic participation contributes to general health and body esteem, healthy weight, social relationships, higher quality of life, and educational achievement.

In an ideal world, both parents would voluntarily contribute to extracurricular expenses. But often when there is conflict between parents, the custodial agreement and child support guidelines provide the framework for conduct. As the current child support guidelines do not address the distribution of child activity fees, it is in the best interest of the child to add this cost to existing and future child support payments.

We look forward to working with you to address these important issues. Thank you for your consideration.