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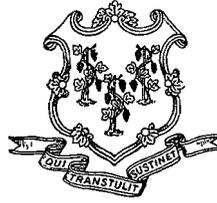
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### Written Testimony of The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women Before the Judiciary Committee Monday, March 5, 2007

#### In support of:

H.B. 6672, AAC Gender Specific and Trauma-Informed State Services  
H.B. 7216, AAC The Transfer of Revenue to the Department of Correction for  
Educational and Reentry Services

Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor and members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide written testimony on the above referenced bills on behalf of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW).

#### In support of: H.B. 6672, AAC Gender Specific and Trauma-Informed State Services

We strongly support H.B. 6672, which would require behavioral health services and substance abuse services provided or funded by the state to be gender specific and trauma-informed; and establish a competitive grant program to identify and encourage best practices in the delivery of gender specific and trauma-informed state services.

Women and girls need services that are gender appropriate and culturally competent, and take into account their specific experiences, especially psychological trauma resulting from sexual or domestic violence. Our current systems for providing treatment to girls and women, whether through the juvenile or adult criminal justice systems, or through programs for people seeking behavioral health and substance abuse services, are not sufficiently integrated and rely too heavily on incarceration or other institutional responses when smaller, community-based services would be better. In addition, some providers are not adequately trained to recognize and treat girls and women who are victims of trauma.

H.B. 6672 requires state funded programs to be more gender specific and “trauma-informed” and promotes the dissemination of “best practices” through implementation of a competitive grant program. Alyssa Benedict, an expert and trainer on this topic, explains that “gender specific systems and services are those that intentionally allow research, knowledge and competency on female development, socialization, risks, strengths, and needs to affect and guide all aspects of system design, system processes, service design and service delivery.”

A growing body of research and experience has demonstrated that girls and women need “gender-specific” services that take into account their particular experiences and developmental needs. For example, an overwhelming majority of girls and women who enter the criminal justice system have been the victims of sexual or domestic violence; in fact, the report issued by DCF pursuant to Special Act 04-05 notes that girls are three times more likely than boys to have been sexually abused by the age of 18. Girls who have been sexually abused are more likely to experience stress, depression and low self-esteem.<sup>1</sup> In addition, research demonstrates that girls and women are more likely to thrive in settings where personal relationships are valued and nurtured, and where cultural differences are also respected.

Treatment or responses that do not address the psychological consequences of trauma will not work, and may actually re-victimize the victims. If we do not invest in the necessary training and development of best practices for providing services to women and girls, we will waste state funding and waste the time and effort of those in treatment as they struggle to succeed in programs that do not work.

### **H.B. 7216, AAC The Transfer of Revenue to the Department of Correction for Educational and Reentry Services**

PCSW supports the proposal in H.B. 7216, which would re-direct \$350,000 of the monies received from pay telephone services to inmates of correctional facilities to expand inmate educational services and reentry program initiatives.

Unfortunately, the number of women in prison has increased dramatically in the past decade. In 1990, 595 women were incarcerated in Connecticut. As of January 2006, the number of women incarcerated increased over 100% to 1,296 women.<sup>2</sup> Many women are incarcerated due to issues relating to their own poverty and abuse. Some engage in prostitution to support drug habits. Others are victims of domestic violence, incest and

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<sup>1</sup> *Plan for a Continuum of Community Based Services for Adolescent Females Involved in the Juvenile Court System*, Department of Children and Families, December 30, 2004, citing various psychological research reports, p. 27

<sup>2</sup> CT Department of Correction Statistics, *Incarcerated Population By Status and Gender, and January 1, 2006 Population Statistics*, accessed 3/06 at [www.doc.state.ct.us](http://www.doc.state.ct.us).

sexual assault who may commit crimes related to the abuse or may be living out lives shaped by the history of the violence directed against them.

There is a critical need for discharge planning. PCSW conducts workshops at York prison, and we have heard all too often about women serving their full sentence at York without the benefit of supervised parole, transitional supervision or probation and no place to go upon release. They have no families or support systems to return to, or just do not want to return to the environment they were in before their incarceration. Women who have been released without a discharge plan often end up in homeless shelters or in situations that lead to their reentry into the prison system. Community supports for inmates, who are released, paroled or on probation will reduce the probability that those released from prison will recycle back into the system. The availability of such support services will not only save the state money, but will also help those who are released to become productive members of society.

We urge your support of these proposals.