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PERMANENT COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

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Written Testimony of The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women Before the Labor and Public Employees Committee Tuesday, February 27, 2007

In Support of: S.B. 1292, AAC the Alternate Base Period for Purposes of Unemployment Compensation

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

As you may be aware, PCSW supported the original bill which established the alternative base period for unemployment compensation. Thus, we support S.B. 1292 which would make it a permanent component when calculating unemployment compensation benefits. The PCSW is particularly supportive of this proposal because it provides needed assistance to former welfare recipients who have recently entered the labor force, as well as to the many women workers who are part of the "contingent" workforce with part-time, temporary or seasonal employment.

Under the standard calculation, the Department of Labor (DOL) could only take into account the wages from the first four of the last five completed calendar quarters preceding the quarter in which a person applies for benefits. The DOL could not take into account the earnings during the quarter immediately preceding the quarter in which the person applies for benefits— it is called a "lag" quarter. For example, if someone applied for benefits today, the months of October to December, 2006 would not be calculated to determine whether the applicant has earned enough to qualify for benefits.

Under the alternative base period calculation, if an applicant does not qualify for benefits using the standard formula, the DOL reviews the applicant's wage history from the four most recently completed calendar quarters, which would include the "lag" quarter. In effect, this change eliminates a three to six month waiting period that some workers currently face when applying for benefits, and allows these workers to receive prompt, timely payments when they lose a job through no fault of their own, at a time when they need the benefits the most.

As you know, the unemployment compensation system was originally designed in the 1930's, and we have consistently modified it to meet the real needs of a changing labor force. The alternative base period is such a modification. In this state, we are asking all adults in our state to work and remain in the labor force. Therefore, there is no reason to penalize the newest entrants to the labor force or those that, due to family responsibilities, only work part-time or seasonally. Rather, we must support their efforts by having rules that treat all workers fairly. We urge passage of S.B. 1292.