

Testimony of Jillian Gilchrest
Before the Appropriations Committee
In Support of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women
Wednesday, February 11, 2009

Good evening Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Jillian Gilchrest and I am a steering committee member and legislative chair to the Young Women's Leadership Program, a project of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women.

The Young Women's Leadership Program (YWLP) was established in 2006 and is lead by a group of young women representing a wide variety of career fields and areas of expertise. Focusing on ages 18-35, the mission of the YWLP is to promote awareness and inspire and empower young women to emerge as leaders. I am here in opposition of the Governor's proposed elimination of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW).

I was asked to join the YWLP at its inception while employed at the Connecticut General Assembly as a Legislative Aide and Committee Clerk for this very committee. To be asked to join the YWLP, a project of the PCSW, was a tremendous honor for me. As an undergraduate at the University of Connecticut I had attended PCSW events that encouraged female participation in government, and had looked up to an institution with such a long history of promoting women's equality.

My experiences with the PCSW, as a member of the Young Women's Leadership Program have been invaluable to me and my development as a leader. Our program has over 320 members and has accomplished quite a bit during our nearly three years in existence. We have conducted body image workshops at college campuses throughout Connecticut, legislative advocacy trainings to students and young professionals, have held networking events and have plans to offer trainings on career development, financial planning, and home ownership.

The PCSW Young Women's Leadership Program provides Connecticut's young women with a network within which to develop themselves and their careers. Many of our

members struggle to find a network once they have graduated or moved into the work force. The PCSW's Young Women's Leadership Program encourages young women to develop as leaders in Connecticut, whether that is in their family life, professional life, or public life.

In addition to our leadership development and networking programs, the YWLP is the voice of young women at the legislature. Too often, the voices of young women, ages 18-35 are left out of policy decisions and debates. The YWLP has testified on more than 75 pieces of legislation, providing a unique perspective on such things as bullying, the solicitation of credit cards, affordable housing, and reproductive health. We engage with our members about the legislative process and incorporate their opinions in the development of our legislative priorities.

For me personally, being a steering committee member of the Young Women's Leadership Program has had a direct impact on my life. When I joined the YWLP, I had aspirations of being a leader on women's issues in the state, but didn't quite have the leadership skills to make that vision a reality. Since joining the YWLP, I have become a board member of the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence, a trustee of the National Association of Social Work Connecticut Chapter Political Action Committee, and the Executive Director of NARAL Pro-Choice Connecticut, a statewide non-profit organization.

I understand that our state and our country is facing harsh economic times and some cuts are necessary, but to eliminate the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women would be a grave loss to this state. Over their 35 year history, the PCSW has been a leader on women's equality in this state and nationally, but the work isn't over.

The young women I know are still struggling with how to balance work and family, how to negotiate a salary that is comparable to their male counterpart, and how to protect themselves against sexual violence and discrimination. We need female leaders in this state to represent us and our concerns. Please do not eliminate the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women and the Young Women's Leadership Program.

Thank you.