

Testimony of Marie Lausch
Before the Appropriations Hearing
In Support of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women
Wednesday, February 11, 2009

Good afternoon Senator Harp, Rep. Geragosian and members of the Appropriations Committee. I am Marie Lausch and I am here today to speak about a matter of great importance to Connecticut voters, Governor Rell's proposal to slash services to State residents that need them most; our women and children. I speak from personal experience, as does every individual that has had to cinch in his or her financial belt during these declining economic times. I am also the President of United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America, Local 222, a group of over 2200 Connecticut Municipal and Board of Ed. members.

There is no doubt that the economy is bad, and may get much worse. This is not a time to cut services to our most disenfranchised citizens, but a time to shore them up. While it is true that women have made great strides since gaining the vote in 1920, their earning power is still at only 78% of a man's, a shameful statistic in these times. When the chips are down, it is the earners at the bottom of the economic scale that suffer most. These are our women and children.

Recently, our Union had gotten involved with the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women as we waged a tough battle with our Wallingford Paraeducators. This hard working group (of mainly women) came nowhere near the pay scale of the Janitors (who were mainly men) in the same town, but they are expected to provide expert care, and continued certifications to work with the children of Wallingford. When they asked for healthcare coverage, their Superintendent told them "You should go on your husbands' insurance." Surely this chauvinistic attitude could not go unchallenged. When the members of the U.E. looked for help, we turned to the PCSW. Not only did we find facts and figures on their website extremely informative, but they became our champion of the uninsured. We held rallies in the center of Town. The PCSW passed the word, and they marched with us. During a public forum attended by many Wallingford residents, Teresa Younger gave a stirring speech on the costs and negative effects of female workers without healthcare. We are convinced that this hearing helped turn the tide of public opinion, informed Wallingford voters, and enabled our Paraeducators to secure for the first time ever, the ability to buy into Wallingford's health insurance. It is true that our members have to pay 50% of the cost of the insurance package. I am sure any one of them would be glad to trade their insurance for the Governor's, but we are making progress.

The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women also serves as a watchdog agency for our State, providing training and information on a variety of topics that directly impact women; we need them to be our vanguard in advancing women's rights.

I agree that we must find ways to cut costs and seek economic alternatives here in our State, but I am furious to hear that when the going gets tough, the tough go after the ones they think least likely to fight back.

I urge Governor Rell, and all our Legislators to find alternatives. What cuts are being made in your offices, and to your budgets and staffing? So my advise to our esteemed governing bodies is; turn

down the heat, turn off the lights, cut down on trips and sabbaticals, close down the Governor's Mansion, but DO NOT leave the people that need help the most adrift. In the words of Madeline K. Albright, our esteemed former Secretary of State, "There is a special place in hell for women who do not help other women."

Sincerely,

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