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Permanent Commission on the Status of Women

The State's leading force for women's equality

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**Testimony of
Teresa Younger, Executive Director
Permanent Commission on the Status of Women
Before the
Government Administration and Elections Committee
Monday, March 16, 2009**

Re: S.B. No. 839 An Act Concerning Mergers And Consolidations Of Various State Agencies;
S.B. No. 840 An Act Concerning The Elimination Of The Office Of Consumer Counsel, The Office Of The Healthcare Advocate, The Office Of Ombudsman For Property Rights And Certain Legislative Commissions; **H.B. No. 6374** An Act Concerning The Establishment Of The Office Of Accountability;

Good morning Senator Slossberg, Representative Spallone and members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee. I am Teresa Younger, Executive Director of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women and it is an honor to testify before you in support of our agency and against the Governor's recommendation to eliminate the PCSW, Commissions like it, and several other entities that impact the lives of women and their families. We understand, as well as anyone, the challenging times the State is facing, the ever growing need to review the government effectiveness and efficiencies.

It is not lost to us that at a time when the PCSW is being recommended for elimination on the State level that on a Federal level, President Obama only last week signed an executive order to establish a Council for Women and Girls. The purpose of the Council stated: "Over the past generation, our society has made tremendous progress in eradicating barriers to women's success. A record number of women are attending college and graduate school. Women make up a growing share of our workforce, and more women are corporate executives and business owners than ever before, helping boost the U.S. economy and foster U.S. competitiveness around the world. Today, women are serving at the highest levels of all branches of our Government...Despite this progress, certain inequalities continue to persist...The purpose of this order is to establish a coordinated Federal response to issues that particularly impact the lives of women and girls and to ensure that Federal programs and policies address and take into account the distinctive concerns of women and girls, including women of color and those with disabilities." The purpose of the order is what the state of Connecticut has been committed to for thirty-six years in its support of the PCSW, equality for women.

PCSW has been bringing the voices of women to the State Capitol for many years, and through all of that time, we've been at the forefront of continuing progress for women in our state. **PCSW is the only nonpartisan comprehensive state institution that evaluates laws and policies for their impact on the lives of women. Our job is to provide information, analysis, and assistance to the General Assembly, State agencies, state leaders and the public on all matters concerning women.** We represent a small

investment that produces a sizeable and valuable return. Because of the work of the PCSW, our state government has been better equipped to address the needs of working parents, victims of sexual harassment, women with health care concerns such as breast cancer and osteoporosis, women business owners, parents seeking child support, women leaving welfare for work, childcare workers, and women entering nontraditional occupations. Because of the work of the PCSW our state has been recognized as a national leader on the issues of women's economic security, health and safety and gender discrimination, battles still faced by women today.

Our budget, post recent rescissions, is just over one million dollars, which is about 77 cents for each of Connecticut's 1,399,625 women over the age of 18. This doesn't even include the next generation of women who will work, pay taxes, raise families or vote in Connecticut. Some would argue, I would argue, that this is a worthy investment of "the people's money." The PCSW changes with the needs of it's community.

Our statutory mandate requires us, among other duties, to "...serve as a liaison between government and private interest groups concerned with services for women..." [C.G.S. 46a-4(b)], and we often think of ourselves as a gateway for the concerns of different populations of women across the state. We have over the years convened a variety of groups in order to bring issues to state government; the PCSW currently convenes the *Connecticut Women's Health Campaign*, a statewide coalition of experts and advocates working together to improve health care for women and girls; the *Young Women's Leadership Program*, which highlights the concerns of women ages 18-35 years; and the *Women In the Trades Exchange*, to increase opportunities for women in the skilled trades and technical careers. Additionally, we also go to where the women are and last year held three public hearings that gave voice to women throughout the state by highlighting their concerns under the topic of financial security.

Our budget represents the type of State spending that saves money in the long run. For example, over the past ten years, the PCSW has provided Sexual Harassment Awareness and Prevention Training to nearly 10,000 state employees in agencies such as the Banking Department, Connecticut State University System Central Office, the Department of Revenue Services, the Department of Correction, the Office of the Attorney General and Legislative Management. *No fee is charged to these agencies.* Without the training services provided by the PCSW, state agencies would have to pay between \$400-\$600 for a two-hour sexual harassment training session required by law for all supervisors.

Prevention is the key to State savings and many of our responsibilities are on-going because change takes time. For example, we continue to work with the Department of Correction (DOC) to reduce sexual harassment against employees. In an ongoing agreement with the DOC, the PCSW has retained former superior court judge Beverly Hodgson, to serve as Sexual Harassment Consultant to monitor all investigations and resolutions of sexual harassment and retaliation claims, and to assist the Department in improving its policies and procedures.

In these ever changing times we have moved forward and highlighted difficult issues such as the problem of human trafficking. As the convening agency of the Trafficking in Persons Council, we have worked with Senator Stillman and the Council members issuing reports, and proposing legislation that provides victims services and enhances training and services for victims. PCSW was and is the State leader on this issue and brings together a level of expertise that should be left with this agency. The issues around trafficking are not just about the prosecution of offenders but also include services for the victims, supports for communities and training for law enforcement and community providers. PCSW has been able to provide an umbrella to link all these groups together and would be opposed to transferring the Trafficking in Persons Council to the Chief State's Attorney's Office.

We continue to work closely with the Office of Workforce Competitiveness (OWC) on the Career Ladders Advisory Council. Jointly we oversaw the allocation of funds for pilot projects to enhance education and career opportunities for workers in the childcare, healthcare and technology fields. We addressed the issues of building the ladders to move our residents to higher levels of self-sufficiency. The comprehensive work of the OWC is critical to moving the State forward and building on the need for higher wage jobs.

We are a resource to the public through the information and referral service we provide. We respond to nearly 500 calls per year from individuals seeking information about state laws and services, and in 2008, staff and Commissioners spoke at nearly 100 events sponsored by groups ranging from the AAUW Statewide, to the Hartford Business Journal, to the UCONN School of Social Work, to Women and Girls Fund of New Haven. We sent out over 6,000 publications and our website was visited almost 65,000 times during the year.

We work diligently to promote women in leadership roles. In fact, last year a record number of women, 102, ran for elected office. We were pleased to see this increase and continue to promote women in a variety of roles. However, it should be noted that women make up 51% of the total population and a little over 30% of the General Assembly. But having women in the General Assembly is not the only place where leadership is needed. We maintain a "Talent Bank" of women interested in serving on State boards and commissions. In 2008, there were over 400 women listed in our Talent Bank. We are truly pleased that the talent bank is now completely searchable electronically by appointing authorities.

In order to provide you with accurate research and analysis we released several publications last year and among them was *Getting to a Better Tomorrow: Economic and Financial Security*. The gathering of this information gives a greater understanding of the women we represent, the challenges they face and the policy initiatives we need to move us all forward. As a continuation of our commitment to providing original research, next month we will be releasing the *Elder Economic Standard Index*, in conjunction with the Commission on Aging. This report will highlight the cost of living in Connecticut for those citizens over 65 years of age.

PCSW represents the concerns of women in the State's administration of programs and services, many of which have been slated for elimination or would remove our voice and the concerns of women from being heard. Our work in these areas fulfill the commission's statutory mandates to: (1) serve as a liaison between government and private interest groups concerned with services for women, (2) oversee coordination and assess programs and practices in all State agencies as they affect women, and; (3) make recommendations for the removal of such injustices it may find to exist. These groups include:

- **Career Ladder Advisory Committee:** PCSW and the Office of Workforce Competitiveness convene this committee. The purpose of this committee is to create new and enhance existing career ladder programs in occupations with a projected workforce shortage.
- **Child Day Care Council:** PCSW is a statutory member. The purpose of this council is to make recommendations to the Departments of Public Health and Social Services on the planning and development of child daycare services.
- **Commission for Child Support Guidelines:** PCSW is a statutory member. The purpose of this commission is to review child support guidelines every four years.

- **Commission on Health Equity:** PCSW is a statutory member. The purpose of this commission is to eliminate disparities in health status based on race, ethnicity, and linguistic ability and to improve the quality of health for all of the state's residents.
- **Commission on the Standardization of the Collection of Evidence in Sexual Assault Investigation:** PCSW is a statutory member. The purpose of this commission is to design a sexual assault evidence collection kit and provide it to healthcare facilities.
- **HealthFirst Connecticut Authority:** PCSW is a member participant. The purpose of this authority is to examine and evaluate policy alternatives for providing quality, affordable and sustainable healthcare for all individuals residing in this state, including, but not limited to, a state-wide single payer healthcare system and employer-sponsored health plans.
- **Statewide Primary Care Access Authority:** PCSW is a member participant. The purpose of this authority is to examine alternative ways to provide primary care, finance insurance coverage, contain healthcare costs, and improve healthcare quality.
- **Trafficking in Persons Council:** PCSW is a statutory member and convenes and staffs. The purpose of this council is to identify criteria for providing services to trafficking victims, and develop recommendations to strengthen State and local efforts to prevent trafficking, protect and assist victims of trafficking.

Who knows where the women and their families of Connecticut would be without the PCSW? For over thirty-five years we have been the state's leading force for women's equality. We have been there through so much; legislation prohibiting sex discrimination in credit transactions; laws enacted to protect pregnant workers; legislation defining and prohibiting sexual harassment; the first family and medical leave protections in the country; legislation requiring insurance programs to provide coverage for a minimum of 48 hours following a mastectomy; legislation requiring health insurance plans to cover a minimum of 48 hours' hospital stay for normal childbirth and 96 hours for Caesarian sections; laws improving the education and compensation of early childhood education professionals; development of Care4Kids programs; establishment of the HUSKY programs; and the list goes on.

At the PCSW, we are working not just for today but for the next generation so they can grow up in a world where full social, political, and economic equality is possible for everyone. We bring you the analysis, the information, the voices, and the testimonials that assist you in your efforts to build that world. Our budget represents a small investment to achieve an important and valuable goal. Now more than ever the women and families of Connecticut need the leadership we provide and our voice on the policies that affect their lives.

Thank you.