

Testimony of Cheryl Sharp

Good day legislators, I am Cheryl Sharp, a life time Connecticut resident, a Civil Rights Attorney employed by the State of Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities for the past 16 and a half years, and a lifetime civil and human rights advocate. I am here as a concerned citizen in support of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women.

The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women advocates on behalf of women and provides research and analysis to the Legislature, and state leaders regarding sex discrimination issues in education, employment, credit, child day care, nontraditional employment and housing. Further, the PCSW in conjunction with the Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities also provides sexual harassment and diversity training to Affirmative Action Officers throughout the state.

The issues and concerns of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women should be considered in all aspects of Connecticut's legislative and governing processes because the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women's advocacy is vital to gender equality in the state. The role of this Commission has become more necessary in recent years due to layoffs of state employees in 2003 that resulted in the dismantling of the Education and Outreach Department of the Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities. The Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities has been stripped to its core and needs the work of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women and Commissions like it to support, supplement and assist the state in rooting out discrimination and preserving civil and human rights. Thus, the work of this Commission and Commissions like it is critical. This Commission and Commissions like it do not represent the bloat in state government. To the contrary, this Commission and Commissions like it provide essential services that the state, women and little girls cannot afford to do without.

The Executive Branch's position, as articulated by the Governor, is that during good economic times Commissions such as the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women serve a purpose, but during tough economic times, we can't afford this Commission or the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission or the Asian Affairs Commission or the Commission on Aging. This position is short sighted, the fallout from the elimination of this Commission and Commissions like it will be too great, the despair of the Connecticut citizens affected will run too deep, and the cost of failing to honor, respect and protect diversity, civil and human rights and equality will be insurmountable.

The mission of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women is to improve and promote the economic development, education, health and political well-being of women in the State of Connecticut. If this Commission and Commissions like it are eliminated there will be no one available to perform their vital functions, no agency of state government to adequately serve their clients, no federal equivalent to pick up the slack. How will the Women of Connecticut be protected when the state's civil rights enforcement agency—CHRO has been gutted and the PCSW is slated for elimination? This has to be as important to each legislator as it is to each of his or her affected constituents-- equality, civil rights and equal opportunity are woven into the fabric of our great state, and now when our state faces such great challenges, is not the time to abandon our progressive government and diminish our hope for equality in the state with the oldest Civil Rights Agency of its kind. Thank you.