

**Testimony of Shannon Houston
Before the Appropriations Committee
In Support of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women
Thursday, February 18, 2010**

Good evening, Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Shannon Houston, and I am a New Haven resident and graduate student at the University of Connecticut School of Social Work. I am here today not as a representative of any specific organization or cause, but simply as a woman, a concerned resident of our state, and a future social worker to urge you to maintain funding for the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women this year and in the years to come.

We need the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women now more than ever. Despite important advances, research shows that there is still more work to be done to enhance the rights and opportunities of women in our state. For example, on average, women in our state make about 77 cents for every dollar men earn¹. Connecticut women still frequently report facing discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace², and many women are forced to choose between going to work and caring for their families, due to lack of paid sick time or of quality, affordable child care. More than 130,000 women in our state today have no health insurance.³ Perhaps most disturbingly, one in four Connecticut women is a survivor of sexual assault.⁴ These scattered statistics combine to paint an alarming picture of women's ongoing struggle for equality in our state, and make it clear that the PCSW has more work to do.

In today's media-saturated culture, women are bombarded with more conflicting messages on a daily basis than ever before. We're expected to pursue careers while supporting our families, and to look beautiful, young, and thin while doing it. Meanwhile, the media tends to focus more attention on negative stories about women as victims, rather than recognizing the many women who are successful and empowered. As a young woman just finding my way in the world, I know these conflicting messages well. However, through college, work, community service, leadership training, graduate school, and the relationships I've built with many strong women along the way, I have begun to recognize my own leadership potential, and to believe in myself enough to use my voice. These experiences have been critical to my development, and I know that the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women is working to ensure that all women in Connecticut have opportunities to pursue such endeavors.

By continuing to support the PCSW, Connecticut is sending a powerful message to all women that our state cares enough about them to spend precious time and resources promoting their rights, safety, economic security, and overall well-being. PCSW's workforce and leadership development initiatives are supporting a new generation of strong female leaders, their trainings and public education are building the capacity of our state to better serve women, and their policy analysis and advocacy efforts are critical to ensuring that all of the legislation passed in Connecticut is fair to all residents. But perhaps most importantly, in supporting the ongoing work of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women, you are letting women know that we matter, that you believe in us, and that you're standing behind us.

Thank you,
Shannon Houston – New Haven, CT
11th Senate district / 96th House district

¹ Institute for Women's Policy Research. *The Gender Wage Gap*, 2008.

² The Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities. *Case Processing Report, Cumulative and Recent Data, Fiscal year 2008-2009*.

³ Health Insurance Coverage of Women Ages 18-64, by State, 2005-2006." The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. December 2007. <http://www.kff.org/womenshealth/upload/1613_07.pdf>.

⁴ "Sexual Assault in Connecticut"(2008). Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc. <<http://www.connsacs.org/learn/stats.htm>>.