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Testimony of Gretchen Raffa, Community Organizer  
Planned Parenthood of Southern New England  
Appropriations Committee Hearing, February 18, 2010

Thank you, Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Gretchen Raffa. I'm from New Britain CT, and I am also here representing Planned Parenthood of Southern New England, which would like to add its voice to those urging preservation of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW). For 36 years, *as long as I have been alive*, the PCSW has been a permanent voice in our government advocating for the most urgent issues facing women. I am proud to live in a State committed to advancing the status of women.

For me, the PCSW is more than a state commission; it is where I started my professional journey 12 years ago, working at PCSW under a Non-Traditional Employment for Women Grant. Fresh out of UConn with my Women's Studies degree, I was ecstatic to work with the PCSW and to learn first hand the important role it plays in closing the gap on gender inequality in our state.

Today, in my role as Community Organizer for Planned Parenthood of Southern New England, I have a new relationship and admiration for the PCSW as a strong, necessary and ever present voice in promoting reproductive justice. I am proud and grateful to have worked with the PCSW in 2007 to pass the *Compassionate Care for Rape Victims* legislation to ensure that women who have survived sexual assault have access to emergency contraception in all Connecticut hospitals.

Our state has been a national leader on reproductive rights and the PCSW has played a crucial role in advocating to improve health care access for women and girls including access to a full range of reproductive health services at hospitals considering merger or affiliation with another institution. It has been the PCSW that, because of its legislative mandate, has been granted the legal status to intervene in several of these situations. As a result, full reproductive health services at institutions like Sharon Hospital have been preserved.

Currently 21.1% of female-headed families in CT live below the poverty line, and that number will rise as the crisis escalates. More women will lack access to affordable health-care and insurance, good jobs, an adequate paycheck, and affordable housing. The struggles women face today are real, often unavoidable and debilitating because of the discrimination we still face. The PCSW is the voice for *all women* in Connecticut. Without it, the most vulnerable population of women may be silenced.

As long as women in Connecticut are being oppressed based on their gender, the work of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women is not done. I urge you to continue to fund the PCSW so that they can continue to promote and advocate for the best policies and laws that directly impact women and their families. I am just one Connecticut woman who is here to say that *I deserve full equality in our state* and I am thankful that *throughout my life* the PCSW has been fighting on my behalf.

Providing answers. Honoring choices. Creating hope.