

Testimony of Carol R. Virostek, Ph.D.
Before the Appropriations Committee
In Support of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women
Wednesday, February 8, 2010

Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian, and members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Carol Virostek. I live at 20 Jeffrey Lane in Berlin. Thank you for this opportunity to address you today and to express my total opposition to the Governor's proposal to eliminate the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women. Just as her predecessor did in his 2003 budget, Governor Rell seems to have targeted those agencies serving the most vulnerable people of our state: in this case, women and girls who are victims of discrimination, bullying, sexual assault, and questionable medical practices and employment policies. I can appreciate the difficulty of the task you have before you of fairly appropriating our limited state resources in these dire economic times. But because of these times, it is even more important to reflect on how and why the PCSW is unique among the other state agencies - and why its \$1.1M annual allotment is that rare investment whose value has actually increased over time.

I have spent my adult life both as an educator and as a volunteer for local and national service and advocacy organizations, whose missions - to promote equity, economic security, child care, health and affordable housing - have all been dramatically advanced by the work of the PCSW. While some organizations do research, some provide social services, and others advocate for legislation, not one has the power to effect positive societal change the way PCSW can. One of its greatest strengths is in coalition building - bringing together dozens of organizations representing a host of women's issues. PCSW is the hub. It systematically gathers data from its partners and translates those data into an effective legislative agenda. It educates our legislators and the public at large on issues that otherwise might have gone under the radar - bullying in schools and the workplace, incidents of sexual harassment and racial discrimination on a college campus, the disparity in wages between men and women doing the same job, unconscionable medical practices such as drive-through mastectomies. And therein lies the difference, ladies and gentlemen. When a service organization or nonprofit speaks out, we can only hope that our legislators will listen. When the PCSW becomes involved as a resource for our lawmakers and government officials, legislation is enacted. And it is only through the passage of law that injustices can be rectified, unlawful practices forbidden and penalized.

But there's more. The free sexual harassment prevention training offered to all state agencies that helps to change the culture of that agency or organization. The referrals to crisis centers of callers who are victims of domestic violence. The guardian angels for victims of human trafficking. PCSW staffers are in the fray - as well as in the Capitol.

Please don't take away this unparalleled advocate for women's health, safety, and financial security that has worked tirelessly and successfully for 35 years. When the PCSW ensures the protection of the rights of women, it ensures positive outcomes and a better life for their families and communities - the citizens of our state. It's what government is obliged to do. To that end, the PCSW is essential.