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PCSW

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 Appropriations Committee
Tuesday, March 1, 2011**

Greetings Senators Harp and Kane, Representatives Walker and Miner and members of the Appropriations Committee:

I'm Teresa Younger, Executive Director of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women, and it is a pleasure for me to be here. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on the PCSW's budget for FY 2012/13.

We respectfully ask you to support the budget proposal for our agency as contained in the Governor's budget document. Considering the cuts my agency has seen over the past few years, and the difficult job you have ahead of you, the proposal for our budget was basically flat and allows only for standard increases. Please know we *do* understand the challenges you all face in the next several months on the budget.

I'm here today to share with you some highlights of the Commission's work over the past year. Before I do, I would ask you to consider the merits of our work based on our track record, our RBA compliance and what the women of Connecticut say about us. Each of the Legislative Commissions has a different constituency, but women remain the only majority consistently treated like a minority. We want you to know that we continue to be *absolutely committed* to bringing the government to **51 percent** of the population. Every day, my staff and I come to work aware of what a privilege it is to serve as *the* voice of women in this state and at the Capitol. And we're committed to assisting each of you with assessments of the policies coming forth and the impact those actions will have on women and their families here in Connecticut.

PCSW is not merely another advocacy or public policy agency. We are the *only nonpartisan comprehensive* state institution that evaluates laws and policies for their impact on the lives of women and their families. Many well-regarded groups turn to us – and especially now as the economy falters. For example, when the Connecticut chapters of the National Association of Women Business Owners (NAWBO) and the Micro Enterprise Resource Group (MERG) closed their doors, they turned to the PCSW to continue working on behalf of women-owned businesses.

In addition, nationally recognized agencies like Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW) identify us as the lead state agency on critical economic security initiatives, and our status on the board of the national Association of Commissions on Women (NACW) raises Connecticut's profile. We're the lead research provider for such groups as the Fairfield County Community Foundation's Fund for Women and Girls, and the Community Foundation of Greater New Haven's Community Fund for Women and Girls, who together represent more than one million Connecticut residents.

For 38 years, PCSW has been providing information, research and analysis to elected officials and the public regarding issues affecting the status of women across their lifespan - from young adults to elders. PCSW establishes legislative priorities, recommends legislative proposals, testifies on bills and helps give critical analysis of how public policy will - or will not - affect the 1,800,652 women who make up 51.2% of Connecticut's population.ⁱ Of the state's female population, 78% (1,437,505) are 18 years of age or over and 15.4% (276,896) are 65 years of age or over.ⁱⁱ Women represent 48% of Connecticut's labor force.ⁱⁱⁱ Of the female population ages 20 to 64, 75.6% (1,063,307) are in the labor force, of whom 66% have children under the age of 6 years old.^{iv}

I will not argue the fact that women in this state have come "a long way, Baby." However, there are still significant challenges before us. Women make, on average, only 76 cents to every dollar a man makes. Until final remedies are in place, women will continue to pay more for their healthcare. Despite our majority status, women make up less than 5% of heads of corporations, and 38% of directors of state boards and commissions. As evidenced by the current fight over Congress's defunding Title X, women have an ongoing fight for access to safe and affordable health care. Too many of us still worry about getting fired for being pregnant, and aren't safe in our own homes. More than 40% of Connecticut's elderly women rely almost exclusively on Social Security for their annual income. Here, in the nation's wealthiest state, a Connecticut woman who lives alone, rents and relies entirely on the statewide average Social Security payment for a single older woman will fall nearly \$12,000 short of basic economic security each year.

Progress is being made, but clearly, for every step forward we, as a society, take several steps back. In fact the Chairs of this committee are making history as the only two African American women co-chairs of a state Appropriations committee, while at the same time this year the General Assembly saw fewer women run and get elected to political office. Thus for the first time in years, the percentage of women in the CGA is under 30%-- 28% to be exact. For some this may not be a big deal, but for the PCSW this reflects the ongoing challenges women face.

So, let me tell you how we are addressing issues before us. I am *pleased* to share with you the highlights of some of the important things we've accomplished. This past year we streamlined and targeted our work.

In our effort to fulfill our statutory mandate, PCSW has identified three issue areas as essential to obtaining equity for women: Economic Security, Health and Safety, and Eliminating Gender Discrimination. Based on these three concerns, PCSW identified a quality-of-life result statement for each priority area with indicators and strategies to "turn the curve," and has identified significant programs, agencies, and activities that contribute to the results we're striving to achieve. Our three "quality of life" desired results are:

- All Connecticut women are economically self-sufficient;
- All Connecticut women have optimal health and wellness throughout the lifespan; and
- All Connecticut women are free from sex discrimination in all aspect of their lives.

In addition to striving to fulfill these very aggressive quality of life desired results, we also have identified 5 goals for the agency. These goals are:

- To assess State policies and procedures as they affect women, and to develop administrative and legislative advocacy strategies to support or change those policies and procedures as needed.
- To gather, develop and disseminate research materials and provide information in order to help the General Assembly, the media and the public at large better understand the status, condition and contributions of women.
- To build partnerships and coalitions among the women of the state, various government agencies and members of the General Assembly.
- To promote awareness of the economic, health, safety, gender equity and leadership status of women throughout the lifespan.
- To promote leadership opportunities for women.

So how do we meet these goals? Our approach is to look at the issues from 30,000 feet up and tie the pieces together.

One of our approaches is through advocacy. And while we're not on the front line of advocacy, we do, in fact, directly affect the public policy that makes the best advocacy possible. After all, the word "advocacy" comes from the Latin meaning "to call together – to summon." That's what we do: we call together the various, diverse voices from across the state so you, as legislators, know what's on the minds of your constituents. Next week, we will host our annual "Women's Day at the Capitol" to allow women from across the state to voice concern on issues ranging from education to pay equity to incarcerated women to housing to leadership development to the ramifications of environmental pollutants on women's health. Each year on this day, a crowd of over 100 women (and men) diverse in its racial composition, the ages of its members, economic strata, profession and geography, bear witness to the importance of the PCSW's work on issues of women's health and safety, economic security and the elimination of sex discrimination.

But advocacy is only part of what we do. Our work also emanates *from* the Capitol *to* the women and families you represent. Our job is to provide information, research, analysis, and assistance to the General Assembly, State agencies, state leaders and the public on all matters concerning women. In the past year, we've spoken to 33 groups, had nearly 900 friends join us on Facebook and over 600 followers on Twitter. We've had several hundred calls to our office for assistance, and a hundred media inquiries. We organized an informational hearing before the Insurance Committee on gender rating. To date, we're monitoring more than 200 bills, testifying on critical topics like workplace bullying, paid sick leave, expansion of FMLA for paraprofessionals, TANF, Care4Kids, first-time homebuyers, and the unintended consequences of the Certificate of Need (CON) process, to name just a few. Our issues are broad and we often find ourselves in front of 10 to 16 committees at any given time.

Prevention is the key to State savings and, as you know, it sometimes takes time to see the fruits of our labor. Many of our responsibilities are on-going because change takes time. It's tempting to say, in an unforgiving economy, that we can't wait for change. But that's like saying we know we have a small tumor, but we're just going to wait and see and hope it doesn't grow. Prevention does make financial sense. Consider a lawsuit finally settled last year against the Connecticut Department of Corrections as a perfect example. In 2003, when female DOC corrections officers and other staff alleged serious misconduct by coworkers and supervisors, PCSW was asked to step in. It was a process that Senator Prague, I'm sure, recalls very well. Through a court-ordered stipulated agreement, the PCSW 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. We monitored the performance of the Department as it implemented measures to change the culture of sexual harassment then prevalent there. Though it took time and commitment, we were able to help change the culture of the DOC. Unfortunately, budget constraints meant that PCSW had to stop its monitoring, and so potential problems have crept back up. So after much discussion the PCSW has just begun an administrative audit of the DOC's sexual harassment process.

The PCSW continues to provide sexual harassment awareness and prevention training to State agencies. Without such training, the State, as an employer, is vulnerable to additional sexual harassment lawsuits, potentially costing the taxpayers millions of dollars, and untold distress. Our role will now be to serve more as a watchdog to monitor whether State agencies are actually providing these required trainings and if so, by whom. The savings from a preventable lawsuit saves the people in this state millions of dollars and reinforces a positive work environment.

There are many such opportunities for us to bring together voices that matter; to ask the difficult, critical questions. That's our mandate: to gather and maintain current information regarding women of the state that can be used to better understand the status, condition and contributions of such women and to act on those findings so the people most likely to have the deepest effect on our society can be informed. Women make most of the economic decisions affecting families. Women determine how children are educated. Women make up half the workforce, are twice as likely as men to volunteer and make 80% of philanthropic contributions. And PCSW is the one out there talking with this highly influential – but underrepresented – population.

We have over the years convened a variety of groups in order to bring issues to state government; the PCSW convenes the *Young Women's Leadership Program*, which highlights the concerns of women ages 18-35 years; and convened the *Connecticut Women's Health Campaign*, a statewide coalition of experts and advocates working together to improve health care for women and girls. Additionally, we go where the women are through public hearings that we hold throughout the state and which give voice to women by highlighting their concerns about financial security. PCSW provides leadership and expertise on seven statutorily mandated bodies; seven boards and 10 coalitions.

As the convening agency of the Trafficking in Persons Council, we have worked with the Council members issuing reports on this issue and proposing legislation that provides victims services and enhances training and services for victims. We just released our latest report, which found that there were nearly 200 victims of trafficking last year in Connecticut, 50 of whom were children. The report also highlights that our Coalition trained and conducted outreach to more than 10,000 people so they might help educate others about trafficking and help identify and serve victims of this terrible crime.

As a new project this year the PCSW led the effort to get more women appointed to executive level positions through our Connecticut Government Appointment Project (ConnGAP). We secured the commitment of all three gubernatorial candidates to strive to have half of their administrations be composed of women. We then solicited and vetted 100 resumes of women qualified to serve in paid government positions and provided the governor-elect's transition team with a binder of the 70 most qualified.

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.

These are just some of the ways in which the PCSW's work has helped gain our state national recognition as a leader on the issues of women's economic security, health and safety and eradicating gender discrimination.

Thank you, in advance, for reading through the packet we are providing. In it, you'll find our RBA information, our Policy Agenda, and a few selected letters of support.

Thank you. I most sincerely wish you well as you go further into your difficult work.
