

On the Necessity of Maintaining and Funding the
Permanent Commission on the Status of Women

February 19, 2013

Greetings, Senator Harp, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Antonia Moran. I am a retired political science professor, having taught at Central Connecticut State University for 20 years. For seven and a half years before that, I represented university faculty as the AAUP lobbyist here. I am currently on the Mansfield Town Council, and Chair of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women. So I understand budgets and the real consequences of cuts. I am here tonight to support the continued independent existence of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women.

The state of Connecticut needs the PCSW as a stand alone commission. This Commission represents the interests of a majority of Connecticut's residents, of all races, cultures, religions and genders. Women's lives are shaped by their sex as much or even more than by their other attributes. Their expectations are different from men's, their experiences are different, their biology is different, and unfortunately, those differences usually work to disadvantage them.

What do we know about women's lives in Connecticut today? Compared to their male counterparts, they are earning less money, retiring on lower pensions, are more likely to be raising their families in poverty and alone, are less likely to own their own homes, have less financial security, more likely to be impoverished in their old age, more likely to have their specific health needs threatened, and on and on and on. Our failure to remedy the disparities women experience affects our whole society. It has an impact on our daughters, our mothers, aunts, cousins, sisters, and yes, ourselves.

The big laws have been passed: the Civil Rights Acts of 1965 and 1972, the amendment to the Connecticut Constitution, the creation of the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities and the comparable federal organizations. The lawsuits have been filed, and decisions rendered. Marriage is more of an equal partnership than ever before. Women and girls study, play sports, expect to work, and to be respected in the workplace.

So why do the inequalities persist? There are still barriers to women's equality in the law, in traditions, and in practice. Women still quit their jobs or choose lower paying ones, in order to provide child and elder care without pay or compensation. They are still shuttled into careers that pay less than men with equivalent background earn. We, as a society, pay poorly or not at all for some of the most important services rendered: child and elder care and care for the disabled. Women of color, women who live in cities, single women and their children fall to the bottom of every economic scale devised.

Who speaks for women and for these women in particular? Who reviews proposed legislation to consider its impact on women? Who has the particular knowledge, experience and sharp watchfulness to understand the implications of the fine points of legislation in practice? Who has the focus, the lack of distractions, to advocate for women's needs? It takes time, organization, and yes, funding, to make sure that any point of view is heard on a regular basis. The voice is The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women.

I've been engaged in this issue for most of my life, and I taught Women and American Law for nearly 20 years. I've watched as great progress was made, and I worry now that it's slipping away. We didn't solve the big problems of economic inequality, even though we added to women's workload. I worry about young women who still, to this day, are not fully rewarded for their intelligence and ability. I watch the pressure on young women to give up, avoid the hard subjects, quit their jobs for their families. I've had students who didn't know how smart they were, and what opportunities were available because the cultures they came from didn't support them. Who would have expected the threat to available birth control and abortion we're seeing around the country? I've watched the declining numbers of women politicians, and women in power with real concern.

I look at the issues the Commission has identified, its legislative agenda, the research it has conducted, and I get angry all over again. No matter how far we have come, we have so much farther to go. I know you are facing tough budget times. But these issues are not expenditure issues: they are ways to build economic stability, to increase earnings, and purchasing power and tax revenues.

Connecticut needs the PCSW. It needs the training it offers to employers, the perspective it offers on economic growth, it needs its watchful eye on legislation. I don't think you can afford to merge it with other necessary groups or to underfund it.