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eliminating racism  
empowering women

**ywca**

hartford region

Testimony of  
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Before the  
Transportation Committee  
February 13, 2013

Re: H.B. No. 6038 AN ACT REQUIRING THE USE OF GENDER-NEUTRAL  
"PEOPLE AT WORK" SIGNS BY THE DEPARTMENT OF  
TRANSPORTATION

Senators Maynard and Boucher, Representatives Guerrero and Scribner, and members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of YWCA Hartford Region regarding H.B. 6038, **An Act Requiring The Use of Gender-Neutral "People at Work" Signs by the Department of Transportation.**

YWCA supports the concepts behind HB 6038, requiring gender neutral signs by the Dept. of Transportation. This proposal was brought to our attention by 11-year-old Isabella Glynn. Her fervor in eliminating stereotypic and gender messages should be an inspiration to all of us who call ourselves feminists. Inadvertent messages regarding gender expectations are pervasive -- even in 2013.

The mission of YWCA is to eliminate racism and empower women. Over the 150 history of YWCA, we have seen that words can take away women's power and negatively impact their expectations about their future possibilities.

We are familiar with CT DOT's current policy to ensure its signs are currently gender neutral; however, this policy does not carry over to municipalities. While we are sensitive to the budgeting constraints and unfunded mandates of municipalities, we would like to see policies as enlightened as those of the CT DOT in force on the municipal level as well.

The need for gender-neutral language is widely acknowledged but it sometimes takes someone who is eleven to help us recognize where we still have opportunities to take away the stereotypes. It costs the same to make a sign that says "Work Zone" as a sign that says "Men at Work." As signage ages out, replacing the templates with different language should be a simple matter.

*This is not just an issue self esteem for women and girls. It is dollars and cents.* According to the National Association of Women In Construction, in 2010 women made up 9% of all construction jobs. As pointed out by the National Women's Law Center, the low percentages of women in the construction industry are driven in part by gender

for every woman

inequity in construction vocational and training programs. Instead of being encouraged to enter these programs, women are often pushed by mentors, family, and friends into occupations that align with traditional gender stereotypes. Such practices contribute to vocational training in secondary and post-secondary programs that are highly segregated by gender, with females concentrated in low-wage, traditionally-female areas. Women are also discouraged from enrolling in and completing construction training programs by barriers such as gender stereotypes, sexual harassment, a lack of awareness about opportunities in construction, and insufficient instruction. In addition, the barriers that women face in pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs drive their miniscule share of the field.

Promoting women in nontraditional occupations is critical to economic growth and stability. Women constitute nearly half of the U.S. labor force, but they remain disproportionately clustered in jobs with lower pay and fewer benefits. Furthermore, women remain severely underrepresented in nontraditional jobs, which are often higher-paying than traditional female occupations. The construction field is a prime example of the problems presented by this underrepresentation. Occupational Employment Statistics data show that the median hourly wage for construction and extraction occupations was \$18.79 in 2010, which is roughly double the median hourly wage for women-dominated occupations such as home health aides, maids, housekeepers, and child care workers. Because construction jobs have the potential to provide women with better pay and career opportunities, increasing the number of women in such jobs is vital to the economic security of women and their families, and, ultimately, to the wider community

YWCA works with 150 high school girls each year in two different programs. One of our programs works with teen moms to make sure that they graduate from high school and they are ready to take the next steps toward a career where they can make enough money for their family to be economically secure. I am proud to say that one of our young women wants to be an engineer and help build buildings. She knows that it will be a very long road but she is taking the first step. Every teen girl should think they have the opportunity and not be held back by gender stereotypes.

There is much more to be done than changing signs to assure that both girls and boys reach their full potential, but we should not miss any opportunity to eliminate gender inequities.

We look forward to working with you to address this issue. Thank you for your consideration.

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