

**Testimony of Joseph M. Suggs, Jr. Submitted to the
Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee
March 26, 2015**

Good morning, Chairman Duff, Chairman Janowski, Vice Chairman Vargas, Vice Chairman Looney, Ranking Member Kane, and Ranking Member Buck-Taylor and members of the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee, my name is Joe Suggs and it's an honor and a privilege to be appointed a member of the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities by Governor Malloy. I am deeply grateful to this committee for the opportunity to appear before you to discuss my interest in serving on the Commission.

I am a native of Connecticut, attended grammar school in Coventry, then moved to Hartford, graduated from Hartford Regional Technical School in 1959 and enlisted in the United States Air Force where I served from 1959 to 1963. After my service, I joined Pratt & Whitney Aircraft, remaining there for several years before joining the plastics research division of Monsanto Company where I focused on new products for the food and beverage container market. I attended college at night while working and earned a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Hartford.

At Monsanto, I was involved in testing of the first plastic Coca-Cola bottle to be approved by the Food and Drug Administration. As supervisor of our food testing laboratory, I fought to ensure that Monsanto recruited and hired women and minorities to fill technical positions at the Bloomfield Research Center. While I was often confronted with the "we can't find qualified candidates" excuse, I persisted and with the help of our Human Resources Department, we were successful in establishing relationships and hiring several candidates from historically Black colleges.

I became involved in political activities in Bloomfield in the early 1980s and was elected Mayor in 1989 where I served until 1993. During that period, Bloomfield was experiencing a rapidly growing minority population and I felt it was important for community harmony and well-being, that town employees, including the Police Department and school staff, reflect the diversity of the community. I strongly supported our Human Relations Commission to oversee municipal hiring and established an ethics commission to ensure that our elected and appointed officials would adhere to the highest standard of ethical behavior.

In February 1993, I became Treasurer of the State to fill the unexpired term of my predecessor. While I focused on generating high returns to the state retirement fund and issuing low cost bonds on behalf of the State, I also continued my emphasis on diversity both within my office and also with the firms and individuals who conducted business with the office of the Treasurer. At least one minority local asset management firm and several bond counsel firms were developed as a result of my efforts.

Although I have been effectively retired for nearly 20 years, I remain fully and deeply committed to the concepts of equal opportunity and nondiscrimination. During the past several years I have worked with the Bloomfield Early Learning Center to assist them in preparing and implementing affirmative-action and equal employment opportunity goals. Recently, I worked with local NAACP leaders in efforts to encourage minority hiring for local and state construction projects. In January of this year, I met with members of the Bloomfield Town Council to discuss and offer suggestions to improve their new affirmative-action plan, which has since been adopted by the Town Council.

Throughout my years of public service I have always had a high regard for the very difficult but essential role that CHRO plays in promoting equality and protecting the residents of our State against discrimination. I wish we were closer to achieving what I believe is a broadly shared goal of "justice for all." Unfortunately, over 70 years after its inception, the Commission continues to receive hundreds of discrimination complaints each year. This may be the result of broader awareness and access to the commission's services or simply a lower tolerance by the public to quietly accept acts of discrimination and injustice. Whatever the reasons it is clear that the role and mission of the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities is as important today as ever in its history.

I look forward to serving on the Commission and will do my best to move Connecticut closer to our goal of equality and justice for all.

Thank you again for this opportunity.

Joseph M. Suggs Jr.