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*The State's leading force for women's equality*

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**Testimony of  
Carolyn Treiss, Executive Director  
The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women  
Before the  
Human Services Committee  
February 19, 2015**

**Re: S.B. No. 895 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING TEMPORARY FAMILY ASSISTANCE**

Senators Moore and Markley, Representatives Abercrombie and Wood, and distinguished members of the Human Services Committee, my name is Carolyn Treiss and I am the Executive Director of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW). Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony in support of **S.B. 895 An Act Concerning Temporary Family Assistance**.

This bill proposes a variety of changes to the Temporary Family Assistance (TFA) program, which is Connecticut's cash assistance program for families with children, administered by the Department of Social Services (DSS). Connecticut's program was implemented in 1996 as a result of federal "welfare reform" and has changed little in the past 20 years. At that time, Connecticut's program was arguably the most draconian in the nation with a 21-month lifetime limit and so-called "family caps," which punish families receiving assistance for having additional children. Both policies remain in effect to this day.

After 20 years of experience with the program, and with few changes made in that time, DSS, the Department of Labor and several advocacy groups began the first comprehensive examination of the program since its implementation. The PCSW views the changes proposed in this bill as a positive beginning to what we hope will be a continuing discussion about the redesign of TFA into a program that is responsive to the needs of the families receiving assistance and is designed in a way that better promotes their chances for long-term economic success.

Most notable among the changes proposed in this bill are:

- **"Stopping the 21-month clock"** for those families with parents who are pursuing education, either completing high school or a GED program or enrolled in higher education, including an associates degree program or apprenticeship program. Twenty-one months has proven to be too

little time to complete most educational programs - education that is essential for parents of families receiving TFA to secure jobs that pay higher wages and give their families a fighting chance at self-sufficiency.

- **Addressing the “benefit cliff,”** when a family is earning wages that are greater than their benefit, they cannot get an extension at the end of 21-months and as a consequence, they lose 100 percent of their benefit. This bill proposes, in these cases, to “step down” the benefit over the course of one year to mitigate the devastating effect of the cliff and to increase the family’s chance for success.
- **Creating a “child care disregard”** when calculating income for eligibility. In other words, if a family applying for TFA has an income above the eligibility standard, DSS would deduct the family’s child care expenses from their income. According to the Basic Economic Security Tables, commissioned by the PCSW and calculated by Wider Opportunities for Women in 2012, the average cost of child care in Connecticut in 2011 was \$1301 per month, which, for a family with one worker, one preschooler and one school-aged child represents the family’s second highest expense next to taxes.
- **Eliminating the “family cap,”** which effectively punishes children born to a family receiving assistance by reducing the additional benefit for that child by half and denying the work exemption for the mother while the child is less than one year old. Family caps make several inaccurate assumptions about women living in poverty and their decision-making with regard to child bearing. Since 1996 not a single study has been able to correlate punitive family cap policies with a poor woman’s decision not to have a child.

The intent of the program in 1996 was to get people off welfare and into work. You probably recall President Clinton promising to “end welfare as we know it.” And while it can reasonably be argued that the program did succeed in getting families off welfare, I would argue that it has not succeeded in getting people into employment that pays enough for their families to achieve long-term economic security. And the primary reason for this failure, is a program that is designed in a way that undermines families’ success at every turn.

However, the changes proposed to the TFA program in this bill are a designed to increase the chances that TFA families can be successful in gaining long-term employment and economic self-sufficiency. This committee can take a small but monumental first step in moving this program in the right direction so that it can begin to work in the interest of the families that it serves.

I look forward to being a part of our continued discussion on this topic. I thank you for your consideration and I welcome any questions you may have.