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Testimony in Support of the Network of the Legislative Commissions

Senator Bye, Representative Walker and Members of the Appropriations Committee, I am Elizabeth Fraser; a policy analyst at the Connecticut Association for Human Services. CAHS works to reduce poverty and promote economic success through both policy and program work.

As an agency that promotes Family Economic Success, CAHS is grateful for this opportunity to voice our continued support for the Legislative Commissions. These valuable agencies provide our legislators, state agencies, social services agencies, and advocates with the information, insight and policy recommendations needed for systemic societal change. By raising issues relevant to their missions, the Commissions give voice to under-represented populations.

Issues that address the needs of low-income working individuals and families are often at the center of the work of the Commissions. Their policy efforts align with the mission of CAHS, and the information that they provide often helps to inform our work.

Commission on Children:

Since 1985, the Commission on Children has served a valuable and unduplicated role towards the well-being of Connecticut's children. The Commission has made it a practice to keep abreast of current national research, trends and developments that promote the health, education and success of all children. Through educational reports, convening work groups and hosting informational forums, the Commission has informed state agencies, policy makers, advocacy groups and other stakeholders of cutting edge research and best practice models. Its work has driven the development of strong policy recommendations that have benefited the children and families of Connecticut.

The Commission has always had the acumen to embrace "family" as part of their conversations about children. While this might sound intuitive, family has often been marginalized or even omitted from children's work. The Commission has led by example; parents' voice is elevated and family need is consistently included in all of the work it does. The Parent Leadership Training Institute is a prime example of how the Commission has developed an effective program that has become a national model. PLTI has given numerous parents the knowledge and experiences to be advocates in their communities and throughout the state.

The Commission on Children's current work on two generation learning opportunities for low income families recognizes the need to provide coordinated, family solutions to generational poverty.

Permanent Commission on the Status of Women:

PCSW advances the economic interests of women, who historically have been paid less than their male counterparts. Currently, PCSW is taking a leadership role in expanding Family Leave in Connecticut. If passed, the pending legislation will allow an employee to take up to 12 weeks of paid family medical leave, at little cost to employers. Employees would pay into the system with no employee match required. This will allow those cannot afford to take unpaid time to be able to be present for close family members who are in need of care. Paid Family Leave is an important and needed program that allows families to care for one another without loss of income or fear of losing their job.

PCSW also makes several resources available to the public including *The Self Sufficiency Standard for Connecticut* and *Basic Economic Security Tables*. These tools are valuable resources, giving agencies such as CAHS information and data that helps us to analyze and recommend policy.

Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission:

LPRAC provides a strong and dedicated voice for the Latino community, which lacks other statewide policy voices. The Commission works diligently to raise awareness of the many issues facing Latinos in Connecticut. Whether language barriers, educational issues or economic self-sufficiency, LPRAC addresses the needs of the population. It works closely with the legislature, state agencies and outside partners to develop and advocate for policies that promotes family opportunity. It is available as a resource to the Latino community, providing assistance in obtaining original birth certificates from Puerto Rico, helping others navigate public services and providing scholarships to student scholars. The LPRAC staff has collaborated with CAHS and other agencies to provide information and data at conferences and events, ensuring that the Latino perspective is included.

The work that it is doing to reduce teen pregnancy is important and compelling. In addition, LPRAC works to increase summer opportunities for low income youth, including summer jobs and internships.

African-American Affairs Commission:

CAHS advocates for several policy recommendations that have been informed by the African American Affairs Commission. Its emphasis on post-secondary student loan debt is an important and timely topic. Student loan debt often puts students well behind, impeding their ability to get ahead. CAHS recognizes that this type of debt has a detrimental impact on many populations and hinders family economic success.

CAHS also supports the work being done on chronic absenteeism. The Commission is developing innovative ideas on how communities can address this problem with a positive and collaborative approach. Using positive strategies to ameliorate barriers to academic success is good for children, families and society.

In closing, CAHS values the work done by each of these Commissions. They exist to promote opportunity and equality for under-represented populations. They provide information and resources to inform a statewide conversation and provide vision for how we can be a stronger and more inclusive state.