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Appropriations Committee
Connecticut General Assembly
Legislative Office Building, Room 2700
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Senators Bye and Kane, Representatives Walker and Ziobron, and distinguished Members of the Appropriations Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony in support of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women in Connecticut ("PCSW").

I currently serve as Vice Chair of the PCSW and I am an elected member of the Greenwich Board of Estimate and Taxation. I am also a former Co-Chair of the Fund for Women and Girls at the Fairfield County Community Foundation, the largest women's fund in the New England states ("FWG").

I write to urge you to continue funding the PCSW as you have in the last budget, with appropriate COLA and step adjustments, and with continued funding for the critical research that the PCSW conducts on behalf of the state's women and girls. I will focus my testimony on the importance of this research.

I became familiar with the PCSW in 2007, when I co-authored a groundbreaking study with the FWG on the status of women and girls in Fairfield County. Our study would not have been possible without the rigorous and respected research conducted by the PCSW. PCSW's research fortified our findings that the most critical issue facing females in Fairfield County was a lack of long-term economic security. Our study led to an innovative program at Norwalk Community College, called the Family Economic Security Program (FESP). FESP is a highly successful model that has increased graduation rates, retention rates and GPA's for its participants. FESP has also helped its participants increase credit scores, build assets, make better academic choices and make wiser occupational choices. The FESP model has received national recognition from the Annie E. Casey Foundation in Baltimore and with a presentation to the White House Council on Women and Girls. FESP has also attracted corporate and private donations. FESP is now being replicated at Housatonic Community College.

PCSW's has continued to release rigorous and critically important research. Last November, PCSW released a study on The Status of Women in Connecticut's Workforce. This compelling study illustrates the challenges and inequities that women face across a variety of workforce measures, including lower labor force participation, lower median earnings at all levels of education, persistent occupational segregation and a persistent gender wage gap of 78 % to male median earnings. This study has profound implications for public policy, education and employment practices around the state. Furthermore, the role of women in the workforce illustrated in this study has profound negative implications for Connecticut's economic recovery and for our economic policy going forward. We can build a more sustainable and stronger economic recovery when we address the many barriers documented in this study that prevent the women in our state workforce from reaching their full potential as salary and wage earners.

I urge you to continue funding for the critical research that PCSW conducts on behalf of the state's women. Loss of this funding means a loss of fundamental information driving philanthropic, educational and policy initiatives that empower women and girls across Connecticut.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Mary Lee A. Kiernan, Esq.
Vice Chair
Permanent Commission on the Status of Women in Connecticut