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**Testimony of
Permanent Commission on the Status of Women
Submitted to the
Education Committee
March 7, 2016**

**Re: S.B. 378, AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS TASK FORCE
H.B. 5557, AN ACT CONCERNING RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS**

Senators Slossberg and Boucher and Representatives Fleischmann and Lavielle, and distinguished members of the Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW) in support of S.B. 378, An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the High School Graduation Requirements Task Force and H.B. 5557, An Act Concerning the Recruitment and Retention of Early Childhood Educators.

S.B. 378, AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS TASK FORCE

For many years, community-based providers, advocates, and lawmakers have sought to address the sexual health needs of Connecticut's youth. As a result of these efforts, there has been success both fostering relationships with individual schools and advocating for policies that instruct schools to teach particular components of sexual health, including requiring one-half credit in health and safety education. We oppose revisions in S.B. 378 to remove this half-credit requirement. In fact, we believe that the state should require more health education, K-12, not less.

In December of 2015, the PCSW brought a diversity of community organizations, state agencies, and commissions together to discuss the feasibility of implementing a comprehensive approach to sexual health education in Connecticut. Sexual health education is "a lifelong process of acquiring information and forming attitudes, beliefs, and values about such topics as identity, relationships, and intimacy." A coordinated and comprehensive approach to educating youth would include components of "sexual development, reproductive health, interpersonal relationships, emotions, intimacy, body image and gender role topics. Sexual health education addresses the biological, socio-cultural, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of sexuality from the cognitive domain (information); the affective domain (feelings, values, and attitudes); and the behavioral domain (communication, decision-making, and other relevant personal skills)." The overall goal of sexual health education is to provide young people with the knowledge and

skills to promote their health and well-being as they mature into sexually healthy adults.¹ Starting early with age-appropriate and developmentally-appropriate information is best practice.

Additionally, with the recent passage of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which replaces the No Child Left Behind Act, health education is now included as criteria for a “well-rounded education”, which replaces the term “core subjects.” Among other things, this act means that school health, physical education and physical activity programs will have access to significant funding under Title IV of ESSA and block grants will be distributed to states under the Safe and Healthy Students program. This is certainly not the time to reduce health education graduation requirements, if anything, it is the time to do more.

The PCSW believes that no young person in Connecticut should be denied the opportunity to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to grow into a sexually healthy adult. We urge you to maintain the half-credit graduation requirement in health and safety education.

H.B. 5557, AN ACT CONCERNING RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

The PCSW applauds Connecticut lawmakers for making access to and quality of early care and education a priority. Quality and access are extremely important for the social and emotional development of Connecticut’s children and the financial security of our state’s working families, particularly women. That said, the pay of early childhood educators who work at early care and education programs that receive state funding, the majority of whom are women, is incredibly low and causes many of the educators themselves to live in poverty.

We support H.B. 5557 which establishes an early childhood educator compensation schedule for early childhood educators to ensure the retention and recruitment of qualified teachers, secure a standard of living that meets the educators’ needs, and reflects the true cost of associated with quality standards for early childhood care and education programs.

Thank you for your consideration of these important policies.

¹ Guidelines for the Sexual Health Education Component of Comprehensive Sexual Health Education, Connecticut State Department of Education, January 2012.