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Testimony from Lindsay Farrell, Connecticut state director of the Working Families Organization.

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, Senator Kane, Representative Ziobron and the members of the Appropriations Committee:

Thank you for holding this hearing tonight, so that we all have the opportunity to speak about what a crucial role some of our state agencies play in Connecticut's democracy.

The Working Families Organization organizes on behalf of working and middle class families for economic and racial justice. We have historically advocated for laws and policies that improve the quality of life of workers and their families — good wages, affordable healthcare, workplace protections and the right to collectively bargain. We believe in a world in which one's life-chances are not determined at birth, and a government where all voices are represented fairly.

First, I would like to express our support for the six commissions, which represent groups of color, the young, the old, and women in our state. We have relied on the data they provide, and the voices they bring into our democracy.

My organization has worked closely with the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women and the African American Affairs Commission on issues ranging from reducing higher education debt to paid sick days. Their commitment to their core constituencies is both essential and inspiring.

As a woman myself, I want to tell you personally how important the PCSW is to me. Inequality is still real, discrimination is still real. We are paid less. Our bodies are treated as public property. We are expected to juggle all the needs of full time work, as well as all the caretaking needs of a family. We have less financial stability at every stage of life. If we are serious about issues such as pay equality, paid family leave, ending a culture that condones violence towards women, or protecting healthcare as a right for all women, we need the PCSW here advocating for us.

The commissions are not a large expense in this budget, and the work they do is priceless. Please support them and protect the resources they need to do their work.

Second, I would like speak against additional cuts to the State Elections Enforcement Commission, especially in it's capacity to administer and enforce the Citizen's Election Program.

Connecticut voters deserve the CEP. We deserve an electoral system that cannot be bought by wealthy interests, and candidates who are not beholden to big money. We deserve a campaign financing system that lets us believe in our elections and our elected officials, in a way that voters across the country just don't anymore because of the corrupting influence on money in politics. We deserve not to be sent back to an era when corruption was rampant.

The proposed cuts undermine the SEEC and it's ability to administer the CEP program, so we hope you will reject them. Furthermore, please maintain agency-specific staff budget lines, for the sake of transparency, and so that this legislature can make decisions more effectively about where resources are going.

We know times are tough, since this legislature has been unwilling to tax the super-wealthy and corporations at a fair level, but our democracy is not somewhere we can afford to make more cuts.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important topic.