

## Testimony of Susan Eastwood

### Before the Appropriations Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly

Feb. 19, 2016

I am honored to serve as a commissioner of the PCSW because in my time on the Commission I have been amazed at the wide breadth of issues the staff of five is able to analyze in order to advise the Legislature on how State policies affect – or do not affect – women and families.

The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women plays a unique role in the fight for equal rights and justice for women. We are a policy group which was formed by legislative mandate 43 years ago, in recognition that women had not yet achieved equality. Connecticut's PCSW is the oldest such group in the nation. Our role is to advise the legislature on issues pertaining to women. As a research and policy group, PCSW does not spend its time fighting the fight on the frontlines of court or clinic. We are the voice for women here, in government. This is a crucial role and will be so until women are truly equal.

But we are not there yet. Women are the only majority (51% of the population) that has consistently been treated as a minority – wrongly, inequitably, and as second class citizens. Women in Connecticut are paid only 78% of the wages a white man earns for the same work. Minority women fare even worse, with African-American women earning 60.3 cents for every dollar earned by men and Latinas earning 46.6% of what a man makes. Women's rights to health care are in jeopardy even as we speak. One in four women will face domestic violence in their lifetimes. These conditions affect not only women, but every man and child who has a woman in their lives.

Our work supports a woman's economic security, health, and safety throughout her lifespan and helps eliminate gender-based discrimination. This important work should not be cut off or diluted by combining it with the many other legitimate concerns covered by the other Commissions, as has been periodically suggested. The savings the state would achieve if they consolidate the Commissions are not great. The current PCSW budget (\$540,000 after recent cuts) costs less than 40 cents per capita for every woman over the age of 18 in the state.

A quick look at just a few of our recent accomplishments is enough to show what a dynamic and effective group this is.

Some examples:

- 900 women will have their rape kits tested, thanks to recent legislation we advanced along with our partner the Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence (formerly CONNSACS);
- Hundreds of victims of sex and labor trafficking are being identified and supported; and
- Women will no longer be punished by employers for discussing wages, thanks to a pay secrecy bill we worked on.

To be sure, some members of our state government "get it." They understand and value the PCSW's work. Rep. Matt Lesser, for example, said in a recent letter to the editor that the State should continue

to fund the PCSW because, "...it is in our economic self-interest as a state to make sure women have pay equity, access to paid family and medical leave, and equal opportunities across the board."

It seems so obvious, and yet the fact that some of our elected officials fail to see the relevance to 51% of their constituency is appalling. Sadly, we are years, if not decades, away from gender parity in this country. And until we achieve it, what part of "permanent" don't they understand?

I strongly urge the Legislature to reject any further proposed cuts and allow the PCSW to continue its excellent work.

Thank you.

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