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February 18, 2016

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

Dear Senator Bye, Representative Walker, 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 am very proud to serve as Chairperson of the PCSW. I have served as a PCSW Commissioner since 2010, when I was appointed by the Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate. In addition, I am an elected member of the Greenwich Board of Estimate and Taxation, where we are also in the middle of crafting our budget for fiscal year 2017. 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 New England.

I write to respectfully request that you continue funding the PCSW at a level that allows us to fulfill the mandate created for us by the General Assembly 43 years ago. That mandate requires annual, measurable results for women in the areas of discrimination, economic self-sufficiency, health, safety, and educational success. This is a broad and complex mandate, and this is a mandate that is just as relevant and crucially important for women in Connecticut today as it was 43 years ago.

The empirical evidence on gender in Connecticut is very clear. Women still face widespread discrimination in the workplace and beyond. Women continue to face far greater barriers to educational success than men. Women face wage inequality, occupational segregation and barriers to credit in the business sector. Women still struggle for basic economic self-sufficiency and fail to build the assets needed for retirement at greater rates than their male counterparts. And women and girls face increasingly complex threats to their health and safety. All of these issues are compounded and complicated by race and ethnicity.

How has PCSW succeeded as the State’s premier advocate for women and girls across all of these topics? First, The PCSW has developed more expertise on the issues facing women and girls than any organization in the state. Establishing and

maintaining that high level of expertise is a substantial undertaking. Second, our legislative agenda prioritizes those issues that have broad impact for women and girls, demonstrate cost effectiveness in challenging budget environments, and produce helpful secondary consequences for our entire state, such as promoting economic growth. A variety of workplace policies for women hit this sweet spot of impact for women, cost effectiveness, and economic growth. Third, despite substantial cuts to staff and budgets in the past, PCSW has continued to produce empirical research that demonstrates both continuing gender inequality in Connecticut and the value of new policy initiatives. This research informs not only the work of the PCSW, but also the work of municipal governments, non-profits, and philanthropists around the state.

The PCSW has also fulfilled its mandate by developing a large network of partners everywhere in Connecticut, including businesses, foundations, fellow advocates, human service providers and elected leaders, who support the PCSW and help leverage the work of our small staff. Attached to this testimony is a compelling set of testimonials from our partners and beneficiaries around the state. Finally, we fulfill our mandate with a disciplined, results-oriented approach. We expect accountability from our staff and from ourselves as a bipartisan group of commissioners. I can tell you with certainty that the State is getting a very high return on investment with the modest amount of dollars budgeted for the PCSW.

Respectfully, I urge you to maintain the current level of funding for the PCSW. Our budget for the current fiscal year represents a very small annual investment of 29 cents for every female in this state. In addition, we are now at a tipping point with our budget where further reductions will disable the operation such that our permanent mandate for women will become impossible to fulfill. Help us keep the promise to women and girls that the Connecticut General Assembly made 43 years ago by maintaining PCSW's modest budget.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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