March 1, 2019

Testimony Before the Appropriations Committee in Support of the Connecticut Commission on Women, Children & Seniors, and the Commission on Equity and Opportunity

Good Evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Elizabeth Fraser; I am the Policy Director at the Connecticut Association for Human Services. CAHS works to reduce poverty and promote equity and economic mobility through both policy and program work.

As an agency that promotes equity and family economic mobility, CAHS is grateful for this opportunity to voice our continued support for the Connecticut Commissions on Women, Children & Seniors, and Equity & Opportunity. The budget limitations over the past years have changed the face of the Commissions, with the original six Commissions being consolidated into two. But thankfully, their work continues, and we would like to thank this body for continuing to support the Commissions, even as difficult decisions needed to be made.

Authentication, Education and Conversation; Each of these valuable agencies provide the legislature, state agencies, social services agencies, advocates, and the public, with the information, insight and policy recommendations needed for systemic, societal change. By raising and responding to issues relevant to their missions, the Commissions give voice to under-represented populations, provide timely information and context to specific issues, and serve as a conduit for conversation and discussion amongst peers.

Authentic voice is at the heart of the work. Each subject that is elevated through the Commissions’ educational forums, or developed into legislation, is weighed with the input of affected populations. Having access to authentic context provides a true perspective, rather than an individual perception, of how Connecticut policies, programs, and funding works for the people. It allows the public to be a part of the solution process, agencies to plan and develop strategies with clarity, and the legislature to make informed decisions.

Additionally, the Commission has made it a practice to keep abreast of current national research, trends and opportunities. With this information, and access to national contacts, they have

A Century of Strengthening Children, Families, and Communities
become exceptional at facilitating educational forums and sponsored events, linking the authenticity from the ground with the work of researchers and policy innovators. This dynamic provides a holistic educational experience for all attending or participating, and provides a deeper understanding of the historic and systemic policies that influence equity and opportunity for across the state. The exposure to cutting edge research and best practice models has driven the development of strong policy recommendations for the benefit of many.

But by far of the most valuable part of the Commissions is the nonpartisan conversation that is facilitated through legislative representation. It is evident from attending many of their facilitated events, that the Commission staff work hard to ensure that the legislators invited to participate on panels represent both sides of the aisle with varying and unique viewpoints. The Commissions provide a public forum, outside of the context of the legislative process, where in depth rounded conversations on topical issues are given room. All are heard and respected, which serves to elevate the discussion and give greater depth to the topic at hand. What results is a dialogue that might not otherwise take place, a deepening understanding of each other and, sometimes, the development of “unlikely partnerships.” These inclusive conversations have a place in our work, as non-profits, state agencies or the public. In a world that seems increasingly polarized, the Commissions work to bridge divides by example, both for the populations they represent and for those of us that are working to find solutions.