



The Commission on
Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity

CWCSEO

Connecticut General Assembly

**Testimony of the Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity
Presented to the Human Services Committee
March 5, 2020**

***S.B. No. 274 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING FUNDING FOR PLANNED PARENTHOOD AND OTHER FAMILY PLANNING CLINICS.**

***S.B. No. 276 (RAISED) AN ACT REQUIRING DRIVERS OF PARATRANSIT VEHICLES TO REPORT SUSPECTED ABUSE, NEGLECT OR EXPLOITATION OF ELDERLY PERSONS.**

***H.B. No. 5306 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING TEMPORARY STATE SERVICES FOR VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE.**

***H.B. No. 5311 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING A BILL OF RIGHTS FOR POST-SECONDARY STUDENTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER.**

Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie, Ranking and other distinguished members of the Human Services Committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity ("The Commission") on several bills on your agenda today. My name is Steven Hernández, Executive Director of the Commission. I am joined by Rosemary López, Woman's Policy Analyst for the Commission.

The Commission wishes to submit testimony in support of the following bills:

1. S.B. No. 274 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING FUNDING FOR PLANNED PARENTHOOD AND OTHER FAMILY PLANNING CLINICS.

The Commission strongly supports S.B. 274, which would offset any loss of funding to vital reproductive health care services due to any reduction in federal funding. Planned Parenthood of Southern New England (PPSNE) alone serves more than 40,000 citizens that are eligible for free or low-cost services. Low income people in the state run the elevated risk of losing vital access to healthcare services if they lose funding. For individuals without health insurance this could mean the loss of reproductive health care such as annual pelvic exams, birth control, STD testing, and PEP/PrEP. With 64% of patients being at or below 150% of the federal poverty level, these resources are critical so that PPSNE and other family planning clinics continue to serve our most disadvantaged families.

2. S.B. No. 276 (RAISED) AN ACT REQUIRING DRIVERS OF PARATRANSIT VEHICLES TO REPORT SUSPECTED ABUSE, NEGLECT OR EXPLOITATION OF ELDERLY PERSONS.

The Commission supports S.B. No. 276, which would make drivers of paratransit vehicles mandated reporters of suspected abuse, neglect, exploitation or abandonment of

elderly persons. We understand the importance of ensuring that vulnerable populations are protected to the best of the law's ability, and through our work creating Connecticut's Elder Abuse Registry we have seen how far this issue reaches.

As we know, Connecticut is rapidly aging. With the rising number of elderly persons comes a larger opportunity for abuse and exploitation. Between 2011 and 2017, Connecticut state investigations of elder abuse, ranging from neglect to emotional abuse to physical abuse, more than doubled, from 3,529 to 7,196. In order to provide our seniors with the safety they deserve, it makes sense to expand the list of mandated reporters to anyone who may be able to identify abuse, neglect, or exploitation. As the state ages and we continue with long term care rebalancing, we will have more vulnerable populations living in the community. Transportation is a critical service, like senior centers and home care, and drivers are in a position to recognize the signs of abuse and, like senior centers and home care, they should report it.

3. H.B. No. 5306 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING TEMPORARY STATE SERVICES FOR VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE.

The Commission also supports H.B. 5306, which would require the Department of Social Services to expedite supplemental nutrition assistance program eligibility determinations for a victim of domestic violence. Furthermore, the bill would require that for any person who applies for Care4Kids and has alleged that they are a victim of domestic violence income standards for determining eligibility be waived for at least 90 days, at which point income would be determined. The Office of Early Childhood ("OEC") would be required to prioritize victims of domestic violence in the intake and eligibility process. What we know of domestic violence is that often the victim is afraid or unable to leave an abusive relationship because it could mean the loss of access to sustenance or critical services, such as childcare. Having to wait for nutritional assistance or childcare adds another challenge to an already traumatic and potentially life-threatening situation. We do appreciate that this bill may have a significant fiscal note but would urge that this legislature prioritize the needs of the most vulnerable people among us, particularly those who are the victims of domestic violence and their loved ones.

4. *H.B. No. 5311 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING A BILL OF RIGHTS FOR POST-SECONDARY STUDENTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER.

The Commission supports H.B. No. 5311, which would ensure students with autism spectrum disorder have the necessary support to achieve success at state institutions of higher education. In an effort to support public policies that are in the best interest of Connecticut's underserved and underrepresented populations, it is imperative that we provide equitable access to all forms of education for our students.

All post-secondary students deserve the opportunity to succeed, and access to the services, supports, and reasonable accommodations that they need to do so. A study in 2017 showed that fewer than 20% of college students with Autism graduated or are on track to graduate five years after high school. For the general population, the graduation rate is 57.6% within a six year time frame. There are commonly identified areas of difficulty that students with autism identify, and by providing these students with a Bill of

Rights that ensures they receive the targeted and specific supports that they need, they will have better and more equitable access to higher education.

We thank you for your thoughtful consideration of these issues, which are so important to so many of Connecticut's citizens.