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2-20-16

### **Testimony in Support of the Network of Connecticut Commissions**

Good Evening Senator Bye, Representative Walker and Members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Elizabeth Fraser; I am a policy analyst at the Connecticut Association for Human Services. CAHS works to reduce poverty and promote economic success through both policy and program work.

As an agency that promotes Family Economic Success, CAHS is grateful for this opportunity to voice our continued support for the Connecticut Commissions. These valuable agencies provide our legislators, state agencies, social services agencies and advocates with the information, insight and policy recommendations needed for systemic societal change. By raising issues relevant to their missions, the Commissions give voice to under-represented populations. The needs of low-income working individuals and families are at the center of their work.

#### **Commission on Children:**

Since 1985, the Commission on Children has served a valuable and unique role towards the well-being of Connecticut's children. The tracks current national research, trends and developments that promote the health, education and success of all children. Through educational reports, convening work groups and hosting informational forums, the Commission has informed state agencies, policy makers, advocacy groups and other stakeholders of cutting edge research and best practice models. Its work has driven the development of strong policy recommendations that have benefited the children and families of Connecticut.

The Commission has always brought "family" to the forefront as part of their conversations about children. While this might sound intuitive, family has often been marginalized or even omitted from children's work. The Commission on Children's current work on two generation learning opportunities for low income families recognizes the need to provide coordinated, family solutions to generational poverty.

In addition, the Commission has led by example, including the parents' voice and family need in all of the work it does. The Parent Leadership Training Institute is a prime example of how the Commission has developed an effective program that has become a national model. PLTI has given numerous parents the knowledge and experiences to be advocates in their communities and throughout the state.

### **Permanent Commission on the Status of Women:**

PCSW advances the economic interests of women. This role is relevant, even today: women are still paid less than their male counterparts. Currently, PCSW is taking a leadership role in expanding Family Leave in Connecticut, a program with a reach that goes beyond women and serves the needs of families as a whole. If passed, the pending legislation will allow an employee to take up to 12 weeks of paid family medical leave, at little cost to employers. This enables those who cannot afford to take unpaid time to care for close family members without loss of income or fear of losing their job.

PCSW also makes several resources available to the public including *The Self Sufficiency Standard for Connecticut* and *Basic Economic Security Tables*. These tools are valuable resources, giving state agencies and legislators information and data that helps us to analyze and recommend policy.

### **Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission:**

LPRAC provides a strong and dedicated voice for the Latino community. The Commission works to raise awareness of the many issues facing Latinos in Connecticut, from language barriers to educational issues or economic self-sufficiency. It works closely with the legislature, state agencies and outside partners to develop and advocate for policies that promotes family opportunity. It is a valuable resource to the Latino community, providing assistance in obtaining original birth certificates from Puerto Rico, helping others navigates public services and providing scholarships. The LPRAC staff provides information and data at conferences and events, ensuring that the Latino perspective is included.

The work that it is doing to reduce teen pregnancy is important and compelling. In addition, LPRAC works to increase summer opportunities for low income youth, including summer jobs and internships.

### **African-American Affairs Commission:**

The African- American Affairs Commission has taken a valuable leading role in many issues relating to family economic success. Its emphasis on post-secondary student loan debt is an important and timely topic. Student loan debt often puts students well behind, impeding their ability to get ahead. Their leadership on chronic absenteeism has been key. The Commission is developing innovative ideas on how communities can address this problem with a positive and collaborative approach. Using positive strategies to ameliorate barriers to academic success is good for children, families and society.

In closing, CAHS values the work done by each of these Commissions. They exist to promote opportunity and equality for under-represented populations. They provide information and resources to inform a statewide conversation and provide vision for how we can be a stronger and more inclusive state.