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**Testimony of  
Natasha M. Pierre, JD, MSW  
Policy & Legislative Director  
The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women  
Before the  
Human Services Committee  
March 1, 2012**

**RE: S.B. 209, AA Increasing Educational Incentives in the Jobs First Employment Services Program**

Senators Musto and Markley, Representatives Tercyak and Gibbons, and members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW) on **S.B. 209, AA Increasing Educational Incentives in the Jobs First Employment Services Program**.

S.B. 209 reiterates the Legislature's commitment in 2012 to conduct a Jobs First Employment Services (JFES) pilot to provide vocational education courses, which would lead to the attainment of a high school diploma or its equivalent. This bill would also allow those individuals to receive extensions of cash assistance while they attain education. If passed, this pilot could benefit approximately 8,000 residents, including 6,654 women.<sup>1</sup>

*CT Specific Data<sup>2</sup>*

- 8,456 people participate in JFES.
- 6,985 or 83.3% are female.
- 63.9% are engaged in job search activities.
- 4.2% are engaged in basic education or occupational skills training.
- 24% do not have a high school diploma.

The JFES program focuses heavily on job search activities; however attention must also focus on the educational or skill deficiencies that many TFA recipients in the program present, such as limited education, lack of child care, housing or transportation. Eighty-eight percent of JFES participants report having one or more barriers to employment:<sup>3</sup> Providing intensive case management could assist JFES participants to get beyond these employment barriers.

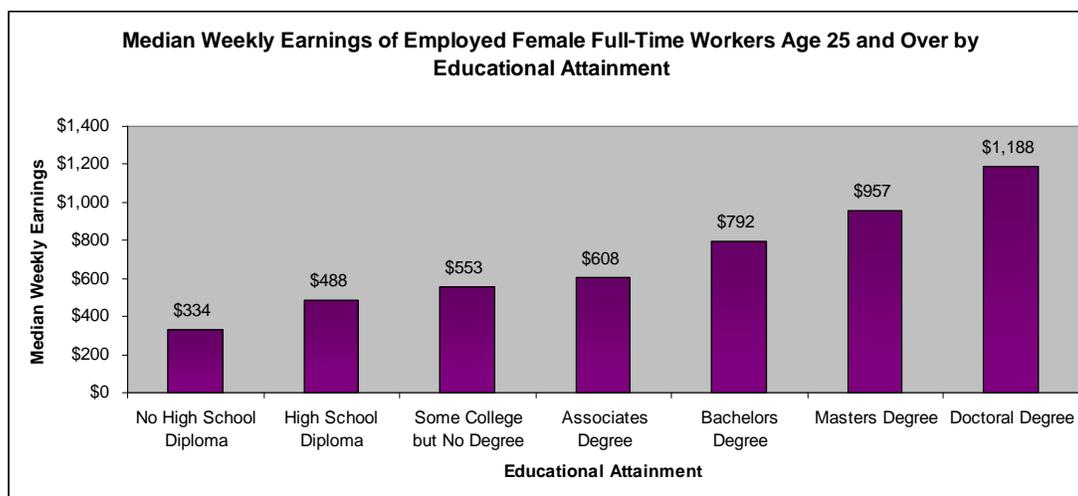
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<sup>1</sup> CT Department of Labor. Jobs First Employment Services *At-A-Glance*, January 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Additionally, 24% of JFES participants do not have a high school diploma, and 3% have low math or reading skills.<sup>4</sup> Statewide, nearly half (46%) of individuals with less than a high school education have incomes below the family economic self-sufficiency standard. The rate drops quickly as education increases, falling to just 8% for those with a college degree or more.<sup>i</sup> Earnings increase significantly for both men and women as educational levels increase. Women who completed high school earn an average of \$542 a week; women with an associate's degree earn an average of \$674 a week; and women with a bachelor's degree earn an average of \$891 a week.<sup>ii</sup>



Providing cash assistance while the individual obtains an education will allow the individual to become economically self-sufficient, maintain employment, and no longer need state assistance. Investments in education and job training are recouped not only by the students, but also in social service savings. It is estimated that the Connecticut community college system saves the State \$24 million each year in social welfare costs.<sup>iii</sup> Additionally, employers report increased profits and other bottom line benefits when their employees gained basic skills which enable them to work more effectively.<sup>iv</sup> Finally, with an unemployment rate of 8.2% in the State<sup>5</sup> and limited job availability, it is an opportune time to build Connecticut's educated workforce, to prepare Connecticut for the economic upturn.

We look forward to working with you to address these important issues. Thank you for your consideration.

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<sup>i</sup>Diana M. Pearce, Ph.D. *Overlooked and Undercounted: Where Connecticut Stands*.

<sup>ii</sup>Catalyst. *Women's earnings and income*. Published April 2011. <<http://www.catalyst.org/publication/217/womens-earnings-and-income>>.

<sup>iii</sup>The Workforce Alliance. 2008. Accessed December 5, 2008 <<http://www.workforcealliance.biz>>.

<sup>iv</sup>The Conference Board. *Turning Skills into Profit: Economic Benefits of Workplace Education Programs*, 1999.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> CT Department of Labor. *Labor Situation*, December 2011.