

Connecticut General Assembly



PCSW

Permanent Commission on the Status of Women

The State's leading force for women's equality

News Release

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PCSW Convenes Group on Set-Asides for Women and Minority Businesses

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HARTFORD -- Several parties concerned with how well State agencies comply with required set-aside criteria for women- and minority-owned businesses came together to discuss options for addressing disparities in the use of State minority contracts. State law requires that the State of Connecticut's departments and agencies spend 25 percent of the total value of all their contracts on small businesses, and that 25 percent of that money (or 6.25% of the total) be designated for minority-owned business enterprises (MBEs) and women-owned business enterprises (WBEs). For the purposes of set-aside criteria, current law does not distinguish among businesses owned by members of ethnic minorities and women.

As per its mandate to further women's economic security, the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW) convened the meeting among the Department of Administrative Services (DAS), the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities (CHRO), the Greater New England Minority Supplier Development Council (GNEMSDC), the CT Lottery and the Black & Latino Legislative Caucus to discuss the roots of the problem and to seek solutions.

The interested parties came together in good faith to examine how well the State's set-aside program is working.

"PCSW invited these groups to the table because we strongly believe that action is best taken collaboratively, and we reject the idea that women and ethnic minorities should vie for the same small allotment of State resources," said PCSW Executive Director Teresa C. Younger. "We're committed to working with all interested parties for a legislative resolution that equitably serves all small businesses. On the table is the issue of whether women-owned businesses and minority-owned businesses are given equal access to contracts; but the greater issue is that all too often, small businesses are shut out of the procurement process, whether those small business-owners are women, blacks, Latinos, Asians, businesspeople with physical disabilities or members of any other marginalized group."

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At its meeting Friday, Jan. 21, the group discussed updating the 25-year-old Disparity Study currently being used, whether set-asides should have different requirements for WBEs and MBEs, and the deleterious effect of current exemptions, which reduce the overall amount of money contracted to both WBEs and MBEs.

The PCSW recommends:

- 1) The State of Connecticut must conduct a new Disparity Study to ascertain whether discrimination exists in State contracting and, if so, to identify its scope and extent on certain groups. The study currently in use is more than 25 years old.
- 2) Legislation should be enacted to require such a study.
- 3) Based on the results of a new Disparity Study, the State of Connecticut should consider separating the set-aside requirements for WBEs and MBEs.

Present at the meeting were: Teresa C. Younger, PCSW Executive Director; Anne Noble, CT Lottery Executive Director; Chelsea Turner, CT Lottery Director of Government Affairs; Dr. Fred McKinney, Executive Director of the Greater New England Minority Supplier Development Council; Alvin Bingham, CHRO Affirmative Action/Contract Compliance Supervisor; Jeri D. Beckford, CHRO Contract Compliance; Rep. Gary Holder-Winfield, chair of the General Assembly's Black and Latino Caucus; Terrence Tulloch-Reid, Exec. Assist to the Commissioner of DAS; Andrea Keilty, DAS Legal Counsel and Legislative Liaison; Meg Yetishefsky, Manager, DAS Supplier Diversity Program; and Christine Palm, PCSW Communications Director.

About the PCSW: The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women was formed in 1973 under Sec. 46a of the Connecticut General Statutes to study and improve Connecticut women's economic security, health and safety; to promote consideration of qualified women to leadership positions and to work toward the elimination of gender discrimination. As a non-partisan arm of the General Assembly, the agency monitors, critiques and recommends changes to legislation in order to inform public policy, and assesses programs and practices in all State agencies for their effect on the state's women. The PCSW serves as a liaison between government and its diverse constituents, and convenes stakeholders, including the business, non-profit and educational communities, local governments, and the media, in order to promote awareness of women's issues.