
18-20 Trinity St., Hartford, CT 06106 • 860/240-8300 • pcsw@cga.ct.gov • www.cga.ct.gov/pcsw/

CONTACT: Christine Palm, Communications Director at 860/240-8449; or 860/836-2145

For Immediate Release Aug. 24, 2010

90 Years of Voting Rights: Women's Equality Day is Thurs., Aug. 26

HARTFORD -- It's been nine decades since Congress voted into law the 19th Amendment, stipulating that, "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex...Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation." The vote was ratified on Aug. 26, 1920, and that date became the national anniversary, "Women's Equality Day" in 1971 at the behest of Rep. Bella Abzug (D-NY).

To mark Women's Equality Day, the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW) has obtained a gubernatorial proclamation honoring the legacy of Connecticut's suffragists, and a citation from the General Assembly's legislative leadership, which reads, in part: "The women of Connecticut have united to assure that rights and privileges are available to all citizens equally, regardless of sex, and have historically played a role in the national suffrage movement. The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women has worked for 37 years to build on the rights secured by the 19th Amendment and continues to increase the visibility of women's contributions in Connecticut..." The citation was introduced by President Pro Tempore Donald Williams, Speaker of the House Christopher Donovan, House Majority Leader Denise Merrill, House Minority Leader Lawrence Cafero, Senate Majority Leader Martin Looney and Senate Minority Leader John McKinney, as well as Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz.

PCSW is also marking the day through its Young Women's Leadership Program (YWLP), which empowers women ages 18-35 to emerge as leaders in government, business and community. YWLP will hold a voter registration drive in conjunction the League of Women Voters. To encourage people to register to vote, YWLP members will be at several locations on Women's Equality Day, as follows: 6:30-9:30 a.m.: Starbucks, 1090 Silas Deane Highway, Wethersfield; 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.: City Place lobby, Asylum Avenue, Hartford; 11 a.m.-3 p.m.: Manchester Community College; 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.: Dunkin' Donuts, 265 Washington Ave, Hartford; 4-7:00 p.m.: Greater Waterbury YMCA, 136 West Main St., Waterbury; and 4-7:00 p.m.: Arch Street Tavern, Hartford.

The cause promoting voting rights equality for women had its roots in the women's rights convention at Seneca Falls, New York in 1848, which produced the "Declaration of Sentiments," a manifesto to end discrimination against women. From there, the fight for voting rights followed an arduous and circuitous 70-year path. Congress actually voted on the amendment as early as 1918, but was waylaid by two years of Senatorial obstruction. It eventually passed both the House and the Senate but failed to get the requisite 75% of states to sign on. Although Tennessee's signing on was the turning point needed, Connecticut's then-sitting members of the General Assembly voiced strong opposition, and did not ratify the 19th Amendment until Sept. 14 (reaffirming it on the 21st), 1920.

In Connecticut, women's suffrage was originally led by Isabella Beecher Hooker (sister of Harriet Beecher Stowe) who helped form the Connecticut Woman Suffrage Association in 1869. Then, in 1910, a new generation of women, led by Katherine Houghton Hepburn (mother of actress Katherine Hepburn), Katherine Ludington, Grace Seton and some others, further developed Beecher's vision and worked hard to convince the General Assembly to ratify the 19th Amendment.

Seneca Falls was also the origin of the League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization that is now open to men as well as women and has 2,300 members in 28 local leagues in Connecticut.

"The League has fought for 90 years to improve our system of representative government and impact public policies through citizen education and advocacy," said Helen Z. Pearl, president of the New Britain area League of Women Voters and a founding commissioner of the PCSW.

The dedication of those who fought for women's suffrage was captured in an August 29, 1920 *New York Times* editorial which stated: "Women, in fighting for the vote, have shown a passion of earnestness, a persistence, and above all a command of both tactics and strategy, which have amazed our master politicians."

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.