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Simple Change in a DMV Form Enhances Key Data Collection

HARTFORD -- At the request of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW), a change being coordinated through the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) and the Secretary of the State's Office (SOTS) will enhance the State's ability to track critical gender data concerning voting registration percentages among Connecticut's population.

Currently, Connecticut residents may register to vote through the DMV's "Motor Voter" Program. However, there has historically been no opportunity for new registrants to check a "gender" box on the registration form. Believing that such gender-specific data is vital to a fair and accurate tracking of trends concerning the state's women, the PCSW in February asked Secretary of the State Denise Merrill to request that the DMV change its registration form to include the optional box for indentifying gender.

"It is very important for our office to know the answer to very simple questions – how many women and how many men are registering to vote and what is the percentage of female vs. male voters registered in Connecticut," Merrill said. "We commend the Department of Motor Vehicles and Commissioner Melody Currey for making the necessary changes to this form to make sure we get more accurate voter registration data. This will result in a clearer picture of our voting population and will be another resource available to aid the public and policy makers."

In a March 25 letter to Merrill, Currey agreed to update the form (B-283: *Special Application for Voter Registration*) as a baseline tool for data collection.

And in a separate statement Currey said, "Voting is an important citizen and civic responsibility. The DMV is eager to assist in whatever ways it can to assist in measuring trends so that outreach and awareness bring more people to the polls."

As a legislative agency mandated to research and report on all matters concerning women, the PCSW made the request because ascertaining the percentages of women who vote in the state is a more accurate marker of their civic engagement.

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“Enlightened public policy emanates from objective data,” said PCSW Executive Director Teresa C. Younger. “We know that women tend to vote in higher numbers than men do, but clearly, we can’t accurately know what percentage of the voting public are women if we don’t know the gender of our electorate. We applaud both Commissioner Currey and Secretary of the State Merrill for their quick and effective response to our request, which will help us and SOTS gather more accurate, Connecticut-specific gender data. This simple change in one form, executed at no cost to the taxpayers – will greatly enhance our ability – and the ability of other policy advisory bodies – to evaluate the role women play in Connecticut’s electorate.”

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.