



Wider Opportunities for Women



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Introduction of *Measuring American Poverty Act* - "Long Overdue" National and State Organizations Show Strong Support

Call Federal Poverty Level "Unrealistic"

Washington, DC - **Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW)** and the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW) applaud the **Measuring American Poverty Act** recently introduced into the House of Representatives by Rep. James McDermott (D-WA). The Act updates the current measure of U.S. poverty, which is based on a formula designed in the 1960s and antiquated data from the 1950s.

"Representative McDermott's proposal not only calls for using current data, but includes food, clothing, shelter and other necessities in its calculations. The present Federal Poverty Level is based only on the cost of food, which is completely unrealistic," said **Joan Kuriansky**, executive director of WOW. *"Most important, the calculation proposed in the bill also allows for geographic differences in the cost of living. This is something that my organization and the PCSW are addressing on behalf of older Americans through the **Elder Economic Security Initiative.**"*

"Income inequality and poverty disproportionately affect women in Connecticut," said **Teresa C. Younger**, Executive Director of the PCSW. *"This is especially true for women of color and older women who rely on social security to pay their household expenses. We cannot design or target resources to strengthen retirement security with an outdated measure of the cost of living."*

The Elder Economic Security Initiative is a multi-year advocacy project to promote the economic well-being of elders. The cornerstone of this nationwide initiative is the "Elder Economic Security Standard™ Index (the Index)" created by WOW in conjunction with the Gerontology Institute of the University of Massachusetts Boston. The Index gives a realistic, geographically based measure of income adequacy, which can be adjusted to reflect the needs of specific living situations. The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women plans to launch the state Index in early 2009 in conjunction with the Commission on Aging.

Based on reliable public data sources, the Index is a tool that quantifies the actual costs of basic expenses for older adults. It measures how much income a senior requires to adequately meet his or her basic needs, without public or private assistance. The Index shows that many older Americans still struggle to make ends meet, even though they are in the technical sense "not poor" because they live above the Federal Poverty Line.

The Index has been introduced in five states so far this year. They are Massachusetts, California, Illinois, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. The response has been significant. For instance, the Massachusetts legislature raised the asset limit for Medicaid home and community-based services from \$2,000 to \$10,000 by illustrating the significant cost of long term care through use of that state's Index.

In the first part of 2009, Wider Opportunities for Women expects to release Indexes for four additional states: Connecticut, New Jersey, Michigan and Minnesota.

Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW) leads two national networks promoting economic security within the United States: the Family Economic Self-Sufficiency Project (FESS) focusing on the needs of low-income working families and the Elder Economic Security Initiative™ program, addressing what income seniors require to age in place. WOW works in 35 states, the District of Columbia, and at the federal level to promote programs and policies that accurately measure the income and assistance needs of families and the elderly. For more information, please visit www.wowonline.org.

The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women was established by the CT General Assembly in 1973. The Commission studies all matters concerning women, informs leaders about the nature and scope of discrimination, serves as a liaison between government and private interest groups concerned with services for women, promotes consideration of women for governmental positions and works with state agencies to assess programs and practices as they affect women. For more information visit www.cga.ct.gov/pcsw.