

The Caucus February Newsletter comes to you a little late this month! Please forgive and read on for Caucus Updates, Committee Reports, and news on Happenings in March.

Despite a break for school vacation, several long-standing issues were taken up by the legislature during February, including legislation granting same-sex partners coverage under insurance plans; a proposed system to overhaul the laws concerning hazardous waste sites, and reform of the Special Education system in the Commonwealth. While none of the above initiatives were passed into law, one particularly controversial bill allowing for same-sex health clubs in Massachusetts, the so-called HealthWorks Bill, did get signed by the Governor in February. Because many women are subject to harassment, or have had previous experiences of sexual abuse, proponents argued that they were entitled to access to a woman-only health facility in order to find the necessary privacy to exercise. Opponents raised the concern that establishing the right to discriminate based on sex would hurt women in the long-run. With Chapter 19 now the law of the Commonwealth, it remains to be seen whether those fears will be justified. Wellsley College hosted a politically-packed conference on campus during the weekend of February 20th. Entitled "Women in American Political Activism," the conference focused on women as elected officials, women in the media, in grassroots activism, and on the international level. Highlights of the weekend included speeches by our own Caucus member, Senator Lois Pines, as well as participation from Deborah "Arnie" Arnesen, former New Hampshire legislator, and Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, Maryland's first female Lieutenant Governor. The conference was inspirational to audience members with encouragement from all speakers for women to take a more active role in politics.

And here on the home-front, Women's Caucus members, with the help of their colleagues, made substantial progress on a number of Caucus priorities during this past month. See below for updates on the latest issues:

UPDATES

Women's Commission

The month included a hearing on H.5199, An Act to Establish a State Commission on the Status of Women, which is a priority for the Women's Caucus. The hearing, chaired by Senator William R Kiting (D-Sharon) and Representative Geoffrey D. Hall (D-Westford), of the Joint Committee on State Administration, involved an inspiring two hours of testimony from women all over the state representing over twenty-five organizations in the Commonwealth. The Committee reported the bill out favorably and it is now before the House Committee on Ways and Means. With the budget debate process just around the corner, Caucus members and women's groups are working to ensure that this important new State Commission is designated funding and its own line item.

Organizational Development

In the meantime, the Caucus Steering Committee is developing a policy for the six appointments to the State Commission. The policy will be voted on by members at this year's Annual Meeting on Friday, February 27th. The proposed process would balance

the needs for an efficient and comprehensive review and consideration process of all applicants with the democratic structure of the Steering Committee.

The Steering Committee will also be proposing guidelines for the establishment of Caucus legislative and budgetary priorities for review and adoption at the Annual Meeting. This proposed process would involve a hearing before the seven-member Steering Committee at a monthly meeting and the approval of fifty-one percent of Caucus members. Additionally, the Steering Committee would also organize a review of budget priorities in March, and recommendations would then be passed along to the Caucus in the same manner as legislation. Both legislative and budgetary requests would require a legislative sponsor (not necessarily a Caucus member). Both proposals stem from the membership's commitment to continued organizational development and the adoption of priorities which are reflective of the concerns of women legislators.

CONNECTING THE DOTS: On Monday, February 23rd, the Legislative Children's Caucus hosted a briefing on early childhood brain development. The event was cosponsored by Connecting the Dots for Boston Tots. The event was a multidisciplinary panel of single-parents, medical and family specialists who focused on the necessity for stimulating children during the first ten years of life. By implementing health care, child care, and home visiting the panel concluded that only "healthy parents and a healthy community" could raise a healthy child.

STATE HOUSE WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP PROJECT: The Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities is almost halfway to its goal of raising \$160,000 to match the legislature's appropriation for artwork that memorialized the contributions of women to public life in Massachusetts. Senator Linda Melconian (D-Springfield), Senator Bruce Tarr (R-Gloucester), Representative Carol Cleven (R-Chelmsford), and Representative Rachel Kaprielian (D-Watertown), the legislative members of a Steering Committee which has been meeting regularly for the past year. The Committee has recently approved a set of Specifications for a mural that will hang outside Doric Hall on the House side of the State House. Over the next few months, a panel made up of five arts professionals will be combing through the Urban Arts Slide Registry and selecting five artists to prepare proposals for the work, which will honor six Massachusetts women: Dorethea Dix, Florence Luscomb, Mary Kenney O'Sullivan, Sarah Parker Remond, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, and Lucy Stone. Next Fall the finalists will present their designs and a winner will be chosen. Installation is scheduled for the early of 1999. For more information, please call Ellen K. Rothman at the MFH, 617-451-9021.

Caucus Committee Work:

WOMEN'S HEALTH: The Caucus Committee on Women's Health sponsored the first-ever Eating Disorder Awareness Day along with the Harvard Eating Disorders Center on Monday, February 9th in Nurses Hall. Initiated by Representative Pamela Resor (D-Acton), the event included a unique art exhibit by Sasha Bergman, with houses of made of clay bread and an eight-foot structure of a woman's body! Representative Resor is also chief sponsor of a bill establishing "truth in advertising" for diet clinics and

products. The bill would require scientific evidence and proof of a significant success rate when advertising for diet products. Publicity on the legislation in the press inspired calls from individuals concerned with issue not only in Massachusetts, but in Maine and Connecticut!!

VIOLENCE, WOMEN, AND THE FAMILY: Work on the Fall conference on Women, Violence, and the Family is keeping this committee busy. The first Steering Committee meeting, chaired by Senator Linda Melconian and Representative Shirley Gomes; to plan for the conference was productive. The conference will focus on the long-term economic and health consequences for women and society when violence against women is unrecognized and untreated. The conference will also examine the barriers to women seeking care and legal assistance. Members of the Steering Committee include: Annie Lewis O'Connor from the Mass. Nurses Association; Marianne Winter from the Mass. Coalition Against Sexual Assault; Marci Diamond and Lucia Zunija from the Department of Public Health; Paula Meara and Brena Lopez from the Springfield Police Department; and Mary Reardon Johnson from the Springfield YWCA.

The Committee has also been asked to support S.338, "An Act Providing Confidential Voter Registration for Victims of Certain Crimes." The bill extends confidentiality protections for the purposes of voting currently given to victims of domestic violence to survivors of rape. S.338 recently passed the Senate and is now before the House Committee on Steering and Policy. Filed by one of the Senate leaders on constitutional protections of women who are victimized by violence, Senator Cheryl Jacques (D-Needham), the bill is now being reviewed by Caucus members.

WOMEN AND POVERTY: The Women and Poverty Committee has continued its work on the education and training delivery system for women on welfare and will be working closely with colleagues in the House to suggest increased access for those welfare recipients who have no GED or high school diploma or are otherwise under-skilled for an increasingly demanding labor market. The working group has developed a flowchart and glossary of the service delivery system which is available for those who are interested. Please call the Caucus office if you would like a copy.

PENSIONS: Representative Rachel Kaprielian (D-Watertown), co-chair of the Caucus Committee on Pension Reform with Representative Barbara Hyland (R-Foxboro), is moving forward with her effort to analyze and propose changes to the Pension system. On Wednesday, February 25th, Representative Kaprielian gave a talk on the status of this special project, which is part of a larger statewide and national effort to reform the retirement system. Reforming the Massachusetts system is of particular concern for women, who frequently do not remain in the job market for ten consistent years and therefore are unable to "vest" and receive retirement benefits. Senator Marian Walsh (D-Boston) is the senate sponsor of a bill which would change the vesting requirement from ten to five years, which is a priority of the Caucus..

Substance Abuse: The Committee on Women, Substance Abuse, and Criminal Justice made two site visits to residential treatment homes for women, sponsored by the Coalition on Addiction, Pregnancy, and Parenting. The committee visited the only substance abuse treatment facility for Hispanic women and their children called Latinas y Ninos in Roxbury, and the New Day treatment center in Somerville, MA. The Committee is working to understand the barriers to treatment and recovery for women

and to increase the awareness of the complexities of treating drug and alcohol addiction. For instance, many women who are diagnosed with a substance abuse problems have a "dual-diagnosis" of other mental health problems which must be addressed. Members also learned about the lack of affordable housing opportunities which makes for increased challenges when women leave treatment.

Last but not least...House One! Enclosed is a Women's Caucus FY99 Budget Analysis of the Governor's budget, House One. Similar to last year, the Caucus will be providing a step-by-step analysis of the budget process. If there are specific line-items which you would like to see tracked, please call the Caucus office at 722-2800 ext.8433.

HAPPENINGS

March is Women's History Month!!

March 2nd - 27th. The Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy and affiliates will host "Families Receiving Welfare: Untold Stories". This is a documentary photo exhibit that will be held in the lobby of the College of Public and Community Service, 4th Floor Wheatley Hall, UMass, Boston.

Friday March 6th, from 7:30-9:00a.m. The Women's Educational and Industrial Union, will be hosting a International Women's Day Breakfast at 356 Boylston St. Please call 617-536-5651 for more information.

Monday, March 9th, at 2:30p.m. Women World Leaders: 15 Great Politicians Tell Their Stories. Introduced by Dr. Elizabeth Sherman, Director of the Center for Women in Politics & Public Policy. The Women's Center, Wheatley Building, 4th Floor, UMass Boston.

Tuesday, March 10th, from 6:30-8:00p.m. The American Association of University Women (AAUW) will be holding their annual reception for women legislators in the Great Hall. Please call the Caucus office to RSVP at 722-2800 ext.8433.

Friday, March 27th, from 6:00-8:00p.m. Candidates for Governor Discuss Women's Issues, sponsored by Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy and affiliates. Lipke Auditorium, UMass Boston. Cellucci, McGovern, Harshbarger and Malone confirmed.