

On July X, 1998 applications became available for the newly-established Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women. The commission was created this year to provide a permanent voice for women across the commonwealth in state government. The commission will work to create awareness about issues affecting women, serve as a central clearinghouse for information, and encourage greater participation among women in state government. **Applications will be accepted between August 1 and September 16, and appointments must be made by November 16 1998.**

On July 22, 1998 the first annual VIEW (Vision In Every Workplace) Awards Ceremony was held on the Grand Staircase of the State House. The five companies that received awards were; MA/COM of Lowell, Trinity Communications, Inc. of Boston, TIAA/CREF of Boston, Franklin Research and Development Corporation of Boston and Outsource Solutions, Inc. of Waltham. All five companies had demonstrated their commitment to developing and implementing personnel policies which support healthy families and communities. **MA/COM** won for their extensive Corporate Wellness Program offering employees a number of health care seminars and an impressive Employee Assistance Program. **Outsource Solutions, Inc.** won for providing employees with extensive flexible scheduling and home-based work opportunities. **Trinity Communications, Inc.** won for offering employees telecommuting opportunities, paid family leave, and resources to assist employees become involved with community organizations and charities. **TIAA/CREF** won for providing employees with flexible spending accounts to enable employees to set aside pre-tax money in dependent day care and health care reimbursement accounts. **Franklin Research and Development Corporation** won for offering employees paid maternity and paternity leave and a loan program for family emergencies of unexpected medical expenses.

The ceremony was attended by senior level employees from all the winning companies. They were joined by the members of the VIEW Awards Steering Committee; Lyn Christianson, Pat Thatcher-Hill, Laura Russell and Andrea Silbert. Representatives from Boston 9-5 also attended the ceremony and offered congratulatory letters to the winners. In addition, representatives from John Hancock, several female legislators and Jackie Cooke from the U.S. Department of Labor were in attendance.

On July 22, 1998 ch. X, The Child Custody Bill was signed into law by the Acting Governor Paul Celucci at the Boston Children's Hospital. This legislation will protect children from domestic violence in child custody determinations. The bill was filed following recommendations from the Supreme Judicial Court in its Gender Bias Study, and members of the Women's Caucus have been leading the fight ever since.

The legislation established standards for probate court judges to use in custody decisions when there has been a history of domestic violence. Specifically, it creates a legal "presumption" against giving custody to an abusive parent. In response to concerns by critics of the bill however, this bill also states that the issuance of temporary restraining orders is not, by itself, sufficient evidence to invoke the presumption. In addition, the judge is required to submit written finding explaining his ruling.

On the Rise is hosting a celebration of two successful years of work with homeless women in the Cambridge area at the **first annual Prepare for Winter Dinner on Thursday, September 17, at the Royal Sonesta Hotel in Cambridge.**

On Wednesday, July 15 Kathy Casavant, the newly elected secretary - general of the MA AFL-CIO, the first woman ever to serve in this position, was our Brown Bag Lunch Speaker. Kathy traced her experience with the labor movement, from a book-keeper to the secretary-general of UNITE. She also discussed her vision of a labor union that reaches out to previously unrecognized groups in labor, specifically women and minorities. Her mission is to organize sectors of the economy that are predominantly women, like the service industry. Kathy also expressed her excitement over getting to know the ways of the State House and the legislators, especially the female legislators.

Senate 774 “An Act Clarifying Protections for Victims of Sexual Harassment and Other Forms of Workplace Discrimination” was released from Senate Ways and Means on July X. This bill will add critical flexibility and enforcement to our workplace discrimination statutes and thereby provide victims of harassment and discrimination with increased protection. The original draft of this legislation extended the time limit for filing claims at the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination from six months to three years. When released from Senate Ways and Means it was amended so the time limit was 300 days.

Senate 2016 “An Act to Prohibit Discrimination in Insurance Policies” was released from X on X. This bill prevents the existing practice of women getting less in benefits in most types of insurance. S.2016 means that women will be able to buy the same benefits at the same price as men do in health, disability, life and annuity policies. More?

Senate 1347 An Act Concerning the Vesting Requirements of Public Employees remains in X. This bill changes the vesting period in Massachusetts from ten years to five years, making it possible for people who work full time for five years to receive a pension upon retirement. The language would also credit one year for every thousand hours worked, which will assist the many part-time workers in the public system. More?

The Massachusetts organizing project on family economic self sufficiency continues to be moving towards it’s goal. The project has been launched in Massachusetts to make the case for strengthening human investment, workforce development and welfare-to-work strategies across the Commonwealth. The Women’s Education and Industrial Union (WEIU) is spearheading the project with a growing number of other organizations. The project will determine “self sufficiency” standards for families in about forty different areas across the state, and advocate for strategies that enable low income families to earn enough to move their families out of poverty and

become self sufficient. **The anticipated release of this information is Labor Day, 1999.**

Joining the effort to put pictures of women on the walls of the State House the Women's Caucus has recently put up two new posters. "Living the Legacy of Women's Rights" and "The Women Suffrage Movement" document the fight for women's rights. All members are encouraged to drop by and view the new additions to the caucus.

The Caucus is working with Representative Pam Resor's Office to learn what must still be done in the Commonwealth to combat eating disorders. During the month of July surveys were sent to area schools asking school nurses how prevalent eating disorders are in their area, what is currently being done to educate children and teenagers about eating disorders and what they believe needs to be done to further fight the problem. Once this information is compiled the caucus hopes to X.

As was the case for many line items in the FY '99 Budget, **Women's Caucus priorities did well in the Final Conference Committee Budget released on X.** With a \$31M reserve for direct care workers and an increase in almost all child care accounts. One of the biggest increases was for a Department of Education grant program to help communities provide education to preschoolers of working parents who earn up the state's median income. The program received \$85M this year, a 31 percent increase. The children of families who make no more than 50 percent of the state's median income also received an increase in subsidized care by \$16M. In addition, the Legislature also added \$2.8M to the state's newborn home visiting program for teen parents and a boost of \$4M to total \$25M for the Department of Public Health's early intervention program for children born with disabilities or at risk of developmental delays.

A great cause for celebration is the first-time allocation of \$100M for the Center for Women and Enterprise. These funds will be used to expand CWE programs into Worcester as well as an increase in existing programs in Boston.

The Women and Poverty task-force also had several victories in the FY '99 Budget. Welfare education and training reserve received \$15M up to \$4M of this may be used for community college scholarships. Up to \$5M is provided for transportation. Up to \$2M can be used for skills assessment up to three months prior to termination. \$2,000 may be used for mentoring. All of the pilot programs are in, all with slight increases.

Senate Bill 338, Voter Registration Confidentiality, was passed into law as Chapter 87 of the Acts of 1998. The chief sponsor of this bill was Senator Cheryl Jacques, a prominent women's caucus member. Currently, law requires that the name and address of any registered voter who presents registrars with a court order granting protection or evidence of residence in a protective shelter be removed from public record. These individuals are then issued a "Confidential Registration" to be used at the polls on election day. This bill seeks to further extend the "Confidential Registration Certificate" to individuals who produce an affidavit attested to by a chief of police or his designee

that the individual is entitled under the Rape Shield Law (Chapter 265, section 24C) to confidentiality of personal information as a victim in the arrest, investigation or complaint for rape or assault with attempt to rape. This allows a rape victim to exercise her rights as a citizen without an added threat of assault.

The Women's Caucus supported a bill originating from the National Order of Women Legislators to remove the "generic" use of masculine pronouns in bills before (and acts of) the legislature. Representative Mary Rogeness was the chief sponsor of this bill which was signed into law as section 6 of Chapter 4 of the 1994 edition of the General Laws of Massachusetts. More than half the states have neutralized their laws and now Massachusetts is one of these progressive states. House and Senate counsel agreed that masculine usage should be minimized and eventually abolished from the laws. The passage of this bill commemorates the 60th anniversary of the National Order of Women Legislators.

S.2142, "An Act Relative to the Hiring of Women on State Funded Construction Projects" was released from House Ways and Means on July X. Studies on the utilization of women construction workers on state projects have indicated a pattern of discrimination against women in the construction trade. Given that the state is given half a billion dollars worth of construction projects, it is essential that we increase the retention and recruitment of the women on these projects. Recently the state was given almost \$2M in federal funds to be used for recruitment, training and supportive services for women in highway construction. This legislation would dramatically increase the effectiveness of these funds.

Women's Caucus members are working closely with Representative Dan Bosley's Office to set up a monitoring and tracking system for welfare recipients who will lose their benefits as of December 1. The Department of Transitional Assistance is investigating whether the Department of Public Health can provide outreach services. It hasn't been decided yet how long it should run, but it's goal is to reach families who may be eligible for other programs, such as WIC or food stamps. Through this, the Department of Public Health can also evaluate welfare reform and the impact the loss of benefits has on families.