

Congratulations Jane Swift

Congratulations to Jane Swift! She became the first female Governor of Massachusetts when Paul Cellucci resigned from the post to become Ambassador to Canada. Swift, a former member and chair of the Caucus of Women Legislators took over the Corner Office of the State House the first week of April. She is one of five women who are currently serving as Governor of a U.S. state and she is the youngest Governor currently serving in the country. In addition she is the first woman in the country to be pregnant while serving as Governor.

The Caucus of Women Legislators sent Swift a letter signed by all 49 women legislators, congratulating Her Excellency on her new position in the State House. The Women's Caucus is enthusiastic about working with Swift on issues affecting women and children across the Commonwealth.

Legislative Priorities

Focusing on domestic violence, economic self-sufficiency, insurance discrimination, and insurance coverage of contraceptives, the Women's Caucus selected the following four bills as legislative priorities for the 2001-2002 session:

S97/H2651 An Act to Ensure Eligibility for Unemployment Insurance for Victims of Domestic Violence (DVUI bill)

S141/H2836 An Act to Establish a Self-Sufficiency Standard in Massachusetts (Self Sufficiency Standard bill)

S805/H2193 An Act to Provide Equitable Coverage of Services Under Health Plans (Contraceptives Coverage bill)

S804/H2534 An Act to Prohibit Discrimination in Insurance Policies (Gender-Neutral Insurance bill)

The Joint Committee on Commerce and Labor held a hearing on April 11 on the DVUI bill which allows victims of domestic violence to apply for temporary unemployment compensation benefits in the event they must leave their employment in order to escape their abusive situation. the Senate Majority Leader and Women's Caucus Co-Chair Linda Melconian and Representative Carol Donovan both testified in support of the bill as the lead sponsors. Representatives Cory Atkins and Alice Wolf also attended the hearing to testify in favor of the bill, while more than 10 women legislators submitted written testimony on behalf of the legislation. In addition, representatives from Jane Doe, Inc., AFL-CIO, Associated Industries of Massachusetts, and a host of other organizations attended the hearing to testify and express their support for the proposed initiative.

The Commerce and Labor Committee will be holding a hearing in May on another Women's Caucus legislative priority, An Act to Establish a Self Sufficiency Standard in Massachusetts. This bill which was filed by Senator Marian Walsh and

Representative Daniel Bosley, requires the Commonwealth to establish a Self-Sufficiency Standard that would provide a more accurate measure of the costs of living, working, raising a family, and paying taxes in Massachusetts. The hearing is scheduled for Wednesday, May 9, 10:30 am, Room A-2. Women's Caucus members are encouraged to submit testimony in support of this bill.

No hearing dates have been set for the two Caucus priorities which are insurance-related bills. The Gender- Neutral Insurance bill codifies the regulations promulgated by the Commissioner of Insurance in 1987 by prohibiting discrimination in insurance policies or prohibiting insurers from differentiating terms, rates, benefits or requirements based upon gender. The Contraceptives Coverage bill requires health insurance plans to cover prescription contraceptive drugs and devices as well as hormone replacement therapy to the same extent that they cover other prescription drugs and devices.

Budget Priorities

The Women's Caucus has felt the constraints of a tight budget for fiscal year 2002 in the recently released House budget. The Caucus is pleased that one of its five FY 2002 budget priorities was fully - funded - the Battered Women's Legal Services Program which received a \$500,000 increase over FY 2001. However, the remaining four priorities of the Caucus did not received only fraction, and in some cases none, of the money requested. The following is a list of Women's Caucus budget priorities for FY 2002 which includes the amount of funding requested by the Women's Caucus, the amount of funding allocated by House Ways and Means, and increase over FY 2001.

Priorities Fully Funded

0321-1600 BATTERED WOMEN'S LEGAL SERVICES

Women's Caucus Request: \$4.8 million

House Ways and Means Allocation: \$4.8 million

Increase over FY 2001: \$500,000

The Battered Women's Legal Services Assistance Program provides legal services to domestic violence victims statewide through ten local legal services programs. These additional funds will provide legal assistance to 550-600.

Priorities Not Fully-Funded

9110-9002 COUNCILS ON AGING

Women's Caucus Request: \$8.3 million

House Ways and Means Allocation: \$6.8 million

Increase over FY 2001: \$500,000

The Councils on Aging are experiencing increased demand for services because of the recent cancellation of health insurance by Medicare HMOs, the increased demand for fuel assistance, and implementation of pharmacy programs.

1599-6899 DIRECT CARE WORKERS

Women's Caucus Request: \$122.2 million

House Ways and Means Allocation: \$15 million

Increase Over FY 2001:\$0

The increase requested by the Caucus would raise the floor for direct care worker salaries to \$25,000, adjust by 3% the salaries of those earning \$25,000-\$30,000, adjust by 3% the

salaries of those earning \$30,000-\$39,000, and appropriate 15% of the expansion of funding for related payroll increases.

Pilot Program - RESIDENTIAL ASSISTANCE FOR FAMILIES IN TRANSITION (RAFT)

Women's Caucus Request: \$4 million

House Ways and Means Allocation: \$0

Increase Over FY 2001: Not Applicable

These requested funds would be used to establish the RAFT program. This pilot program would provide up to \$3,000 in flexible funds as a one-time benefit to homeless families or families at risk of becoming homeless who are under 130% of the federal poverty level.

7003-0700 SELF SUFFICIENCY STANDARD IN MASSACHUSETTS This request is linked to a legislative priority of the Women's Caucus S141 / H2386 *An Act to Establish a Self Sufficiency Standard in Massachusetts*. This bill requires the Commonwealth to establish a Self-Sufficiency Standard which will provide a measure of the costs of living, working, raising a family, and paying taxes in Massachusetts. **The Women's Caucus requested an increase of \$100,000 in the line item for the Corporation for Business Work and Learning to support updating the Self-Sufficiency Standard and developing a software tool for use in Massachusetts. No money was allocated for this initiative in the House Ways and Means Budget**

Amendments were filed on all four of the priorities that did not receive the full funding that was requested by the Caucus. The House will be debating and voting on the budget this upcoming week. The Senate will release their budget and vote on it at beginning of June.

Other Legislation

District Attorneys Martha Coakley of Middlesex County, Kevin Burke of Essex County, and Ralph Martin of Suffolk County recently met with women legislators to discuss S. 968 "An Act to Establish Partnerships for Children's Safety." This legislation, which is sponsored by Senator Therese Murray, authorizes District Attorneys (DAs) to establish community-based juvenile justice programs that permit DAs, teachers, school administrators, the probation department, state and local police departments, the youth services department, social services department, public health department, and other social service providers to exchange information that is deemed relevant in identifying youth at-risk of delinquent behavior and intervening on the youth's behalf to ensure safety in public schools.

The Women's Caucus has not taken a position on this legislation. Those women legislators who support the bill argue that these juvenile justice programs will enhance communication among those in the best position to identify early warning signs in at-risk youth. This will in turn enable the different entities involved to develop strategies to connect children to the appropriate social service programs.

Those opposed to the bill who attended the meeting argue that these programs will enable different entities to share information about a youth that should be kept

confidential, and to use this information in a prosecutorial rather than a rehabilitative manner. They also feel that it will deter parents from sharing important information about their children for fear that this information could potentially be shared and used against their child in the future.

For more information on both sides of the legislation, offices can contact the Women's Caucus at 722-2800 ext. 8433.

Keys to the Governor's Office

April was an exciting month for women in Massachusetts as Jane Swift accomplished a political milestone by becoming the first female Governor of the Commonwealth. However, a report published in March by the Barbara Lee Foundation entitled "*Keys to the Governor's Office*," indicates that access to the Governor's office is still quite an elusive one for women. According to the study, the number of women legislators at the state and federal level has steadily increased over the last decade, but women have a more difficult time overcoming voters' fears and stereotypes when trying to attain success in gubernatorial contests. There are currently only five women governors in the country, including Governor Swift. In the 225 year history of the United States there have been at total of only 19 women to hold the top executive office in their state.

In its report, the Barbara Lee foundation, outlines eight key challenges for women running for Governor. This list includes the ability to demonstrate previous executive leadership, the need to cultivate a "tough but caring" leadership style, and voter requirement that women behave as an outsider with the knowledge of insider. Barbara Lee will be speaking about this report in more detail at a "Red-Alert" networking event cosponsored by the Caucus of Women Legislators, and the Massachusetts Women's Political Caucus, Wednesday, May 16, 5:00pm -7:00 pm, Lock-Ober. All Members and staff are welcome to attend. The Women's Caucus has extra copies of the report available in its office.

Moldavian Women

The Women's Caucus enjoyed a little international flavor in April as women legislators had the opportunity to meet with a delegation of women from Moldova. These women all work at non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that focus on a variety women's issues such as women's civil, health, and reproductive rights, protection of children and domestic violence prevention. In their meeting, the two groups discussed the some of the common challenges that women face in both countries. Trafficking of women for the purpose of prostitution and violence against women were the issues of most concern to the Moldavian women.

The legislators and the Moldavian delegation also talked about the role of Women in government. Moldova, which is situated between Ukraine and Romania and has been an independent country since 1991. Currently as 9 women serve in its 101 member Parliament. The President of the Parliament is also a woman.

