

## **Legislative Priorities**

With the deadline recently past, for Committees to report on the legislation before them this session, the Women's Caucus has had a mixed bag of fortunes with its legislative priorities. Two priority bills of the Caucus were put into studies, while the other two were given favorable reports

The Committee on Commerce and Labor put S141/H2836, "An Act to Establish A Self-Sufficiency Standard in Massachusetts," into an "active" study. However, at the Committee's June 19<sup>th</sup> executive session, House Chairman William Greene stated that the Committee would like to make a few minor changes to the legislation before issuing a favorable report. Members of the Women's Caucus are encouraged to contact the Commerce and Labor Committee to voice their support for this legislation. Language to establish the Self-Sufficiency Standard was also included in the Senate budget, but not in the House version.

As it is written now, the bill requires the Commonwealth to establish a Self-Sufficiency Standard to provide a more accurate measure of the costs of living, working, raising a family, and paying taxes in Massachusetts. This Standard would be developed by the Corporation for Business Work and Learning with the assistance of an advisory board comprised of 15 members representing the public, nonprofit, business, labor, and education sectors. It would be used as a tool for measuring performance within the State's workforce development system, and provide an important set of benchmarks regarding job placement levels.

In addition, to the Self-Sufficiency Standard legislation, S804/H2534 "An Act to Prohibit Discrimination in Insurance Policies," (the Gender-Neutral Insurance bill) was also put into a study by the Insurance Committee. This bill has been filed for a number of years, and has passed unanimously in the Senate the last two legislative session. It codifies the regulations promulgated by the Commissioner of Insurance in 1987 by prohibiting insurers from differentiating terms, rates, benefits, or requirements based upon gender. The Women's Caucus will be working to encourage the Insurance Committee to move this bill out of a study order with a favorable report.

Despite the news on the Gender-Neutral Insurance and Self-Sufficiency bills, the Women's Caucus is pleased that both S97/H2651 "An Act to Ensure Eligibility for Unemployment Insurance for Victims of Domestic Violence," (DVUI bill) and S805/H2193 "An Act to Provide Equitable coverage of Services Under Health Plans (Contraceptives Coverage bill) received favorable reports from their respective committees.

The Commerce and Labor Committee referred the House and Senate versions of the DVUI bill to their respective Ways and Means Committees, while the Insurance Committee referred the Contraceptives Coverage bill to the Senate Ways and Means Committee.

## **Contraceptives Coverage Boost of Support**

The demand for contraceptives coverage recently received an outside boost of support when Seattle's Jennifer Erikson won a sexual discrimination lawsuit against her employer, Bartell Drug Company. The drug company was found to be in violation of sexual discrimination guidelines included in the 1964 Civil Rights Act of 1964 because it did not provide health care coverage for prescription contraceptives and devices.

In his ruling, U.S. District Court Judge Robert Lasnik wrote, "Although the [Bartell] plan covers almost all drugs and devices used by men, the exclusion of prescription contraceptives creates a gaping hole in the coverage offered to female employees, leaving a fundamental and immediate health care need uncovered." This ruling only covers those women who are employed and insured by Bartell Drug Company which means it is still necessary for Massachusetts to pass legislation requiring health insurance plans to provide coverage for prescription contraceptive drugs and devices to the same extent they cover other prescription drugs and devices.

## **Budget Priorities**

Women's Caucus budget priorities fared well in the House and Senate versions of the FY 2002 budget. Both included the full increase in funding requested for the Battered Women's Legal Services and the Salary Reserve for Direct Care Workers, and both included an increase in the funding for the Councils on Aging (COAs). However, the Senate's budget allocated \$500,000 more for COAs than the House. It also included \$4 million to establish a Residential Families in Transition (RAFT) pilot program, and \$100,000 to establish a Self-Sufficiency Standard.

Currently the budget is in conference to reconcile the difference between the House and Senate versions. The Women's Caucus has requested that the conferees include the Senate language in the final budget for the line items regarding the Councils on Aging, Self-Sufficiency Standard, and RAFT. Members of the Women's Caucus are encouraged to contact the conferees on these items as well.

The following is a description of each of the Women's Caucus budget priorities which includes the amount of funding requested by the Caucus, and the amount of funding allocated in the respective House and Senate budgets

### **0321-1600 BATTERED WOMEN'S LEGAL SERVICES**

**Women's Caucus Request: \$4.8 million**

**House Allocation: \$4.8 million**

**Senate Allocation: \$4.8 million**

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.

#### **9110-9002 COUNCILS ON AGING**

**Women's Caucus Request: \$8.3 million**

**House Allocation: \$6.8 million**

**Senate Allocation: \$7.3 million**

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 Allocation: \$25 million**

**Senate Allocation: \$25 million**

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 Allocation: \$0**

**Senate Allocation: \$4 million**

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**

**Women's Caucus Request: \$100,000 (earmarked)**

**House Allocation: \$0**

**Senate Allocation: \$100,000 (earmarked)**

These requested earmarked funds would be used by 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. 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*.

### **Brown Bag Lunch**

Women sports writers from *The Boston Globe* were the guest speakers at the Women's Caucus Brown-Bag Lunch in May. Shira Springer who covers the Boston Celtics, Barbara Huebner who covers the track and field events, and Judy VanHandle, who is an editor of the Globe's Sports section, shared their experiences as women working in the field of sports media.

Springer discussed some of the challenges she has faced as the beat writer for a major professional men's team. Huebner commented on some of the differences between her and Springer's assignments for the *Globe*. Writing about track and field events,

Huebner has more opportunities to cover women in sports and tends to work in a different environment and on a different schedule than Springer does.

*The Boston Globe* has a total of five women who work for the Sports Section. Nancy Marrapese-Burrell who covers the Boston Bruins, and Susan Bickelhaupt, who covers women's basketball and other sports, were not able to attend the luncheon.

### **Women Presidents of Ivy League Universities**

Two women were recently appointed as presidents of Ivy League universities, bringing the number of female presidents of the eight Ivy League institutions up to three (37.5%). The first woman to serve as the president of an Ivy League university was Dr. Judith Rodin, who was selected on December 16, 1993 and is still serving as the seventh President of the University of Pennsylvania. On June 15, 2001, Dr. Shirley Tilghman will become Princeton University's 19<sup>th</sup> President, and on July 1, 2001, Ruth Simmons will begin serving as Brown University's 18<sup>th</sup> President.

According to a survey of college presidents by the American Council on Education, the number of women serving as presidents of colleges and universities has grown from 9.5% in 1986 to 19.3% in 1998. In 1998, approximately 460 of the 2,380 presidents who responded to the survey were women.