March 4, 2020

To: House State Government Finance Committee

From: Barbara Battiste

**HF 2533: Funding of the Office on the Economic Status of Women (OESW)**

Mr. Chair, Members of the Committee, my name is Barbara Battiste. I was Director of the Office on the Economic Status of Women (OESW) from 2014 to 2017.

OESW, created by the Legislature in 1976, is a non-partisan office within the Legislative Coordinating Commission. OESW has a single staff position and an annual budget of approximately $120,000. In 2017, funding for continued operation of OESW was eliminated.

I would like to address the need for a special legislative office focusing on women’s economic security and to explain what OESW is and what it does.

Although today many women attain college degrees and most women are in the paid work force, the fact remains that women overall make less than men. Those who suffer in particular from this disparity are single mothers, minority and immigrant women, and older women.

Why do women earn less?

* Part of the reason is outright discrimination, though that’s a small percentage of the cause;
* Part of the reason are the careers women tend to choose: nurses, teachers, social workers, nonprofit workers, food service, retail, child care;
* By far the largest reason, though, is that women work fewer hours over their careers than men.

Why?

* Women bear children. We take time off for childbirth and caring for infants.
* Women are very likely to be the principal caregivers for their children—meaning women take time off work if children are sick, or there are meetings with teachers or snow days or doctor’s appointments. And women are less likely to stay late at the office because they often are the ones rushing home to take care of the children.
* Women are also more likely than men to be caregivers for aging parents or spouses—leading to more time off work and sometimes to early retirement.

**OESW provides research and advice to legislators on policies that will help women achieve economic security.**

To get an idea of the work OESW does, I urge you to take a look at its legislative website, at [***https://www.oesw.leg.mn***](https://www.oesw.leg.mn)

You will see

* Annual summaries of new state laws that address women’s economic issues;
* An analysis of the impact Minnesota’s pay equity laws have had since enactment over thirty years ago;
* Data developed by OESW on women in Minnesota’s elected offices, most notably showing that 51% of Minnesota’s counties in 2015 had no women on the county boards. 84% had no or only 1 woman on the county board.
* A report developed by OESW on women-owned businesses in Minnesota, not only comparing Minnesota’s women-owned businesses to men-owned businesses, but analyzing women-owned businesses by race and ethnicity.
* Information gathered by OESW’s annual listening sessions throughout the state, advising legislators on what women in every corner of Minnesota say contributes to their economic successes or remains as a barrier to financial security.

During the legislative session, OESW reviews every bill introduced and prepares a briefing paper for legislators if a bill has a significant positive or negative economic impact on women.

Funding for OESW was terminated in 2017. Since then, none of the work above has been done. I urge you to once again provide the means for research on women’s economic issues to continue.

*Respectfully submitted by: Barbara Battiste*

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