

Testimony Presented by Channing Martin, Government Relations Associate, Women and Girls Foundation. On behalf of Heather Arnet, CEO, Women and Girls Foundation.

Presented to The House Democratic Policy Committee public hearing on state budget education cuts Friday October 21, 2011, Green Tree Municipal Center's Council Chambers.

Good Afternoon,

My name is Channing Martin, I serve as the Government Relations Associate at the Women and Girls Foundation and am currently enrolled at Carnegie Mellon University's Heinz College where I am pursuing a Master's Degree in Public Policy.

I am here today to present testimony to this committee on behalf of Heather Arnet, CEO of the Women and Girls Foundation. Ms. Arnet is out of town today, or she would be here herself. She asked that I present this testimony to you and thank the members of this committee for inviting our organization to present expert testimony to the committee today. We especially want to extend gratitude to today's meeting co-chairpersons, Representative Smith, Representative Wagner and Representative Deasy, for requesting this hearing and our participation today.

The Women and Girls Foundation is a non-profit community organization based in Downtown Pittsburgh which serves the eleven county region. The mission of our Foundation is to achieve equality for women and girls in the Southwest Pennsylvania region. Our vision is to create a region where women and girls have equal access, opportunity, and influence in all aspects of their public and private lives. In pursuit of this vision, in recent years we have especially focused our efforts on articulating the impact of the recession on women in Pennsylvania, and advocating for their inclusion in economic recovery efforts.

As women make up 52% of the population of the Commonwealth, and over half of the workforce, tax base, and social service recipients in the state, we feel that it is especially critical that our government consider how budget cuts and state budget investments will impact women and families in particular.

We understand that the purpose of today's hearing is to consider the impact state budget cuts are having on communities in western Pennsylvania as the

policy committee evaluates what needs should be considered when developing next year's state budget.

As the committee asked the community for the purposes of this hearing to focus on Education budget cuts, we will highlight the impacts that these particular state budget cuts are having on children and working families in Southwest Pennsylvania. However, we also want to spend some our time today encouraging the committee to work with their colleagues in Harrisburg to take a holistic approach to the budget process.

For example, it is foolhardy to consider cuts to education spending and pretend that these will not have a long term impact on increasing incarceration rates, and juvenile detention, and security spending throughout the state long-term. We also should consider how support for pre-school education and full-day kindergarten not only result in higher educational outcomes for children, but also result in more economic and job stability for working parents. These are some of the best investments the state can make, in the current and future workforce of our state. And yet, inexplicably they seem to be the programs that are the first to go when budget negotiations take place.

When considering education spending we should think about how we can leverage these investments to create the highest trained, best educated workforce in the country. And how we can use these funds to re-train millions of unemployed parents throughout our commonwealth so that they can re-enter the workforce, find a quality job with a family sustaining wage, and be able to become citizens that generate tax revenues for the Commonwealth long term, rather than merely thinking of these individuals and families as social service recipients and spending line items.

The current budget, included cuts of nearly \$930 million for public education. Although we are grateful to those of you who worked so hard to successfully restore about \$254 million, of additional cuts that were included in the Governor's original budget proposal. We are grateful that the cuts were not as draconian as they could have been. But we are still left in a quandary as to why the cuts occurred in the first place.

These cuts were made despite the state's more than half billion dollar surplus this year. As a like amount is expected next year, we ask you - why is it that many of the state's school districts, particularly the poorest ones, must resort to drastic measures to absorb cuts in state aid. These include raising local taxes, cutting instructional programs, laying off teachers and other staff,

closing buildings, eliminating pre-school and full day kindergarten, and in some cases, even considering a four-day school week.

If we want to help families be economically self-sufficient, if we want to increase job retention of single female headed households, why would we put additional barriers in their way?

In addition to asking this committee to re-invest in education in the 2011/2012 budget we want to encourage you to work together - across party lines and chambers - to introduce and pass a state bill mandating full-day kindergarten throughout the Commonwealth. Such a law would provide enhanced equity to children and families. Currently the benefits of full-day kindergarten are provided inequitably throughout the state, and the costs of sustaining these programs, or alternate quality early childhood programs, fall on local districts, communities, and ultimately families.

And inevitably it is our poorest families and least resourced communities that are left with the bill. With child care subsidy wait lists already at record highs along with unemployment rates for single parents, a bill supporting full-day kindergarten across the state should be an educational and economic development priority for the legislature and the Governor.

Jim Buckheit, executive director of the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators said, "A reduced investment in public education will affect the future of the entire state for years to come. A strong education system is required to prepare an educated, skilled workforce and to prevent social ills in the future."

And he is absolutely right. Study after study has shown that there are unfortunate direct correlations to be seen in educational outcomes for our children and later delinquency and incarceration rates. Similarly there are correlations that exist between state investments in education and state investments in incarceration.

Our main point is that cuts in the State Education budget might benefit the balance statement of the Commonwealth in the short term but will ultimately result in billions of increased spending through the next several decades. By failing to invest adequately in the education of our children we are guaranteeing increased unemployment rates for citizens in Pennsylvania.

And none of us can afford for that to occur. We already have inexcusable poverty and unemployment rates in this state, especially for women raising young children on their own.

In 2009 single female headed households with children made up 74% of those living in poverty in our region and 68% of households living in poverty across the state. Unemployment rates for single mothers have doubled since 2007 and are TWICE that of their married male counterparts.

State budget cuts not only resulted in decreased social services for the poor. They also cut thousands of jobs. Jobs in the health care, education, and child care sectors. The majority of which were held by women, many of them raising children on their own. The U.S. Department of Labor, recently reported that women lost 86 % of the jobs cut in the government sector during 2010 while men received 90% of new jobs that were created during this time. The cuts included in the current budget moved families from economic self-sufficiency to unemployment and poverty.

We urge this committee, the State Assembly, and the Governor's administration to consider how all state programs are investments of taxpayer resources and as such we should invest these dollars with an eye towards maximum return on investment. Cutting early child care education and food programs for poor children, and health care and educational programs for their mothers may result in short term gains but all of the data demonstrates that these cuts will also result in significant long term losses to the state and our community.

We should learn from International development agencies and research which has quantified that investing in and improving the economic security of women and families is a reliable path to full community economic development. As Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn quantified in their book, "Half the Sky," and as has been endorsed by leading national philanthropists from Davos, to the Gates Foundation, Goldman Sachs and the Clinton Global Initiative, investing strategically and with intentionality in educating girls, investing in the reproductive health care of women, and creating economic opportunities specifically for single mothers can result in dynamic and far reaching economic recovery for communities.

What would it look like if the PA Department of Welfare, Department of Education, and the Department of Labor and Economic Development, and their respective committees in the legislature, worked together to ensure that job readiness programs and job creation initiatives were strategically developed to

provide opportunities for single mothers to connect with living wage careers with health benefits?

Investing in social programs to advance these women and their children would result long term in their transition from households in poverty reliant on social programs and support to economically self-sufficient and thriving households providing the city and state with earned income and property tax revenue.

These changes will come from making strategic investments and by stewarding job creation and training with a gender lens to the unique interests, strengths, skills, and challenges that single mothers have as they reenter the workforce. To ignore these challenges is shortsighted. To invest in supports which will help women surpass these while they build up the economic stability of their families should be the future that we are all working towards.

And one last note. Because the budgeting process is a complex and complicated pursuit, we wanted to also leave you with one idea today on how you can have an immediate impact on improving educational and economic outcomes for young women throughout our state right now - and during the current legislative session.

We urge you - to urge your colleagues - to approve the Gender Equity in Athletics Act (SB 209 & HB 209). These sister bills were introduced by Sen. Mary Jo White (R-Butler County) in the Senate and Rep. Tim Briggs (D- Montgomery County) in the House. Last year the bill was passed unanimously through the Senate but failed to come up for vote in the House before the session ended. Currently these bills have been re-introduced and are sitting in the education committees of both chambers.

This provision requires secondary schools in Pennsylvania to provide an annual report of athletic opportunities available to male and female secondary school students. The purpose of the Act is to ensure that girls' and boys' teams and athletes receive equal resources in secondary schools throughout the commonwealth. There is compelling data connecting athletic participation in girls to decreased pregnancy rates and eating disorder rates, and increased academic performance and college acceptance and completion rates. This month you can work with your colleagues to make this bill a law. By doing so, without spending one extra dollar, you can improve educational outcomes for girls throughout our state and take an important next step in ensuring that state resources are distributed fairly and smartly throughout our state to benefit all children and families. Thank you.