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HOUSE RESOLUTION

TO SUPPORT AND PROMOTE THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
ADVANCEMENT OF ARKANSAS WOMEN BY ENCOURAGING THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY, AND STATE, COUNTY, AND LOCAL
GOVERNMENTS, AND PUBLIC AND PRIVATE EMPLOYERS TO
IMPLEMENT THE RECOMMENDATIONS DEVELOPED BY INTERIM
STUDY PROPOSAL 2011-032.

Subtitle

TO SUPPORT AND PROMOTE THE ECONOMIC AND
SOCIAL ADVANCEMENT OF ARKANSAS WOMEN BY
ENCOURAGING IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
RECOMMENDATIONS DEVELOPED BY INTERIM
STUDY PROPOSAL 2011-032.

WHEREAS, HB1911 of 2011 calling for the collection of data to determine women's economic status and other issues in Arkansas was referred for interim study, recognizing that based on various studies, in particular a 2002 Institute for Women's Policy Research report, "The Status of Women in the States", that women in Arkansas fare poorly economically and that wide disparities were based on gender, race, ethnicity and region-based factors; and

WHEREAS, the study entitled "Women's Social and Economic Status in Arkansas, Interim Study Proposal 2011-032" was released in 2012 and concluded that women in Arkansas fare poorly in a variety of areas including health,



education, human trafficking, and economic status; and

WHEREAS, women's economic insecurity is exacerbated by disparities between men's and women's wages; and

WHEREAS, women-owned firms in Arkansas make up 24.5% of the total firms in the state, 4 percentage points lower than the national rate of 28.7%; and

WHEREAS, although women-owned businesses make up nearly 25% of all businesses in the state, the Office of State Procurement awarded just 2.3% of state contracts exceeding \$25,000 to women-owned businesses during the 2011 calendar year; and

WHEREAS, Arkansas women working full-time are paid approximately 82 cents for every dollar paid to their male counterparts; and

WHEREAS, a lack of employment opportunities, a lack of appropriate job skills and training, and a lack of adequate child care are factors that affect women's employment opportunities; and

WHEREAS, the common public perception that prostitution is a victimless crime has led to Arkansas's human trafficking problem being a low priority for law enforcement and too few resources being dedicated to eradicating prostitution or responding to incidents involving commercial sex where actors are believed to be adults; and

WHEREAS, the study found that the public stigma placed on reputed "prostitutes" inhibits victim reporting, and prevents a closer look into the circumstances surrounding each individual's involvement in the commercial sex industry and the discovery of forced or coerced participation; and

WHEREAS, women in nearly a quarter of Arkansas counties are expected to die younger than they were a generation ago; and

WHEREAS, the health of Arkansas women is threatened by a number of factors, including, but not limited to: high rates of heart disease, stroke,

cancer, lung disease, and obesity; and

WHEREAS, women in Arkansas face poverty-related barriers to their good health and well-being, including lack of support to consumers to navigate the health care system, lack of insurance options, lack of evidence-based substance abuse and mental health treatment, and workforce shortages in primary care and dental care; and

WHEREAS, a majority of non-elderly adults receiving Medicaid in Arkansas are women; and

WHEREAS, among Arkansas adults, 20% read at or below the 5th-grade level, hindering health literacy and the ability to understand and use information in health-promoting ways; and

WHEREAS, Arkansas ranks among the lowest in the United States in the percentage of women 25 years of age or older with a bachelor's degree, leading to fewer job opportunities and lower earning potential for women; and

WHEREAS, the subjects young women are encouraged to study is important in determining the jobs that Arkansas women eventually will pursue; and

WHEREAS, only 7% of female professionals are employed in the relatively high-paying computer and engineering fields, compared to 38% of men; and

WHEREAS, in spite of inroads made towards equality in collegiate athletics under Title IX, female student-athletes do not receive the same level of financial support as male student-athletes; and

WHEREAS, women hold far fewer leadership positions at all levels of the education spectrum, from elementary school through college; and

WHEREAS, based on its findings, the study recommends that the General Assembly:

- (1) Pass a paid family leave law for parents;

(2) Pass legislation requiring the Office of State Procurement and procurement offices in state agencies to revise their contracting and purchasing policies to provide more contracting opportunities for women-owned businesses by creating a program to set aside certain state contracts as specifically for women-owned businesses;

(3) Require businesses seeking contracts with state agencies to demonstrate their commitment to identifying and combating pay inequality and job segregation by sex;

(4) Implement pay equity reforms and create a Pay Equity Task Force to provide recommendations for achieving pay equity among public and private employers and to study sections of the proposed federal Paycheck Fairness legislation on training, negotiation skills, research, education, and outreach;

(5) Reinstate the Arkansas Women's Commission for the purposes of:

(A) Developing a permanent advisory council on poverty reduction and economic opportunity to coordinate efforts to reduce poverty in Arkansas and evaluate the progress and effectiveness of anti-poverty initiatives; and

(B) Establishing a consumer advisory council to identify policy changes and areas for improvement in the state's processes for awarding and distributing public health benefits;

(6) Support meaningful human trafficking reforms;

(7) Support school-based community health centers to:

(A) Expand to include targeted wellness services for women in the communities served, especially Medicaid-eligible services for women;

(B) Expand mental health services at existing school-based community health centers;

(C) Promote and develop health literacy;

(D) Collect and analyze data for feasibility studies to be presented to designated legislative committees for further recommendations; and

(E) Establish a center for health literacy to coordinate and fund activities that improve health literacy in Arkansas;

(8) Support data collection and research in which the Arkansas Public School Resource Center, the Department of Education, and the

Department of Higher Education collect and publicly report gender-specific data on educational performance and graduation rates; and

(9) Support education initiatives designed to improve quality education for female students in Arkansas, pre-kindergarten through higher education by:

(A) Promoting parent involvement, opportunities for female students to learn and excel in historically male-dominated fields of study, sports participation, and the inclusion of women's history and accomplishment in school curricula; and

(B) Encouraging the expansion of junior and senior counseling opportunities for female students to learn about existing and emerging fields of study and jobs with economic potential that traditionally have been associated with males, recruitment efforts of women in male-dominated fields of study by the state's higher education institutions, and an increase in emphasis on partnerships between two-year and four-year higher educational institutions and local high schools to foster learning opportunities for female students in historically male-dominated fields of study,

NOW, THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE EIGHTY-NINTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ARKANSAS:

THAT the House of Representatives strongly supports the recommendations to the General Assembly found in the report entitled "Women's Social and Economic Status in Arkansas, Interim Study Proposal 2011-032", and supports and promotes the economic and social advancement of Arkansas women by encouraging the General Assembly, state, county, and local governments, and public and private employers to implement the recommendations of the report.