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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MAY 19, 2004

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Women from Across the State Make their Voices Heard

Raleigh, May 19, 2004—Today hundreds of emails poured into the NC General Assembly in support of Virtual Women's Advocacy Day, sponsored by NC Women United. The event marked the first time that NC Women United has added a virtual component to their advocacy day.

"We wanted to make advocacy as real and accessible to as many women as possible across the state," said Paige Johnson, President of NC Women United. "During the NC Long Session, we hold an in person advocacy day so that activists can meet with their legislators but we know that many women and their supporters are unable to take the day off to come to Raleigh."

NC Women United is a coalition of organizations and individuals committed to advancing public policies that support the full economic, legal and social equality of women.

Today's theme was, "What's at Stake for Women in the Short Session?" The answer might surprise many readers. While many of the legislative agenda items, like violence against women and pay equity, are traditionally identified with women's rights, NC Women United says that issues like campaign finance reform also affect women disproportionately.

To underscore this point, NC Women United pointed out that women are the majority of participants in Medicare and Medicaid and other publicly funded programs and yet their participation in public policy decision-making is underrepresented. "Women have a tremendous amount at stake in our government's public policy decisions but not

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Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Coalition of NC • American Association of University Women NC • Business and Professional Women of NC • Council for Women/Domestic Violence Commission • Democracy NC • Equality NC • General Federation of Women's Clubs of NC • League of Women Voters of NC • Lillian's List of NC • Mecklenburg County Women's Commission Department • NARAL Pro-Choice NC • National Association of Social Workers NC • NC Alliance for Economic Justice • NC Association of Women Attorneys • NC Coalition Against Domestic Violence • NC Coalition Against Sexual Assault • NC Hunger Network • NC Justice and Community Development Center • NC National Organization for Women • NC Peace Action Education Fund • NC Women Work • NC Women's Political Caucus • Onslow County Council for Women • Orange County Department of Human Rights and Relations/Commission for Women • Peace College • Planned Parenthood of Central NC • Triangle Older Women's League • The Sisko Foundation • Western Carolina Women's Coalition, Inc. • The Women's Center of Chapel Hill • Women's Forum of NC • Women's Resource Center in Alamance County • Women's Resource Center – Hickory

enough women are around the table when these decisions are made,” says Beth Messersmith, Co-Director of Democracy NC, a member of NC Women United. One of the reasons cited by Ms. Messersmith is the cost of running for office

“Women traditionally have a harder time raising money for campaigns and aren’t typically in a position to finance their own race, especially as the cost of running for office continues to climb with each election cycle,” says Messersmith. “Women need an alternative that will allow non-wealthy candidates to compete on Election Day.”

For this reason, NC Women United included in their advocacy agenda a bill that would give cities and counties the authority to sponsor a public financing program for their local elections (SB 760).

Following the 2003 Long Session, NC Women United published a Legislative Report Card that graded the progress that the NC Legislature had made on enacting bills that would improve the lives of women. Four of the bills outlined in the report card are eligible for consideration in the Short Session.

“We came together as NC Women United in order to leverage our collective power,” added Johnson. “Part of our strategy is to help each other by adding our voices in support of legislation that is of particular importance to women.

To this end, NC Women United included several measures in their advocacy day program:

- ✓ Increase funding for rape crisis and domestic violence centers.
- ✓ Create Civil No-Contact Protective Orders (H951)
- ✓ Support House Select Committee on Domestic Violence Recommendations
- ✓ Support Criminal Background Checks for Long Term Facilities
- ✓ Fund Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Programs
- ✓ Pass Legislative Study Commission on Pay Equity for Women State Employees
- ✓ Support Local Campaign Finance Options