

### **Black & Puerto Rican Caucus Forum**

Public Testimony of the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF)

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The Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF) is a statewide, nonprofit organization that advocates for and empowers women and girls in Connecticut, especially those who are underserved or marginalized. For forty-six years, CWEALF has been a leader in the development of policy solutions that enhance women's economic security, combat discrimination at work, and promote gender equity in our state.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus' forum tonight. Each year, CWEALF leads a legislative agenda centered on women's economic security. Prior to the beginning of this year's legislative session, the creation of CWEALF's agenda was informed by listening sessions across our state with women of color. Each conversation collected input from participants on the barriers they experience to reaching economic security.

[CWEALF's legislative agenda is available on our website here.](#) Below we've also highlighted several issues critical to advance the economic security of women, especially women of color, in our state.

**Fair Work Week:** Sixty seven percent (67%) of low-wage workers in Connecticut are women, the majority of whom are women of color. Low-wage workers are often forced to work with little notice, maintain open availability for "on-call" shifts without any guarantee of work, and have shifts cancelled at the last minute. On-call shift scheduling prevents workers, especially women who continue to shoulder the majority of caregiving responsibilities in their families, from planning ahead and arranging child care or doctor's appointments. CWEALF supports S.B. 227: *An Act Concerning a Fair Work Week Schedule* to prohibit on-call scheduling and advance the economic security of low-wage workers and their families.

**Salary Range Transparency:** Women in Connecticut typically earn \$0.84 for every dollar paid to men, a disparity more severe for women of color. Black women in Connecticut earn \$0.57 and Latina women in Connecticut earn \$0.48 for every dollar paid to white men. While Connecticut has taken action in recent years to prohibit pay secrecy and the use of salary history in the application process, raise the minimum wage, and implement paid family and medical leave, progress overall to close the gender wage gap has stalled in recent years.

For this reason, CWEALF supports legislation that requires employers to provide applicants and employees information about salary ranges for each vacant position. Transparency in salary ranges is a critical component to close the wage gap, as women often ask for less when they negotiate than men, even when they are otherwise equally as qualified. Studies show that when job applicants are clearly informed about the context for negotiations, including the range and types of compensation and benefits available, women are more successful at negotiation, which reduces gender wage gaps. and addresses occupation segregation by amending existing law to require equal pay for comparable work.

**Equal Pay for Comparable Work:** Similarly, CWEALF also urges lawmakers to pass legislation this year to require equal pay for comparable work. Current statute requires equal pay for equal work, a standard established decade ago to increase the rights of women working in manufacturing jobs with tasks identical to the person next to them on the factory floor. Today, “equal pay for equal work” is outdated and does not address occupational segregation that has led to lower pay scales for jobs that are considered traditionally female vs. those that are considered traditionally male, even when both jobs require substantially similar skillsets and responsibilities.

**Expand Eligibility in the Care 4 Kids Program to Parents Participating in Education/Training Programs and to Homeless Families:** Nearly 50% of female-headed households in Connecticut under the age of 65 are unable to afford basic household necessities including housing, transportation, health care, and childcare. Access to affordable child care remains a significant barrier to not only to women’s economic security, but also to their ability to advance in the workforce.

CWEALF currently serves as the advocacy partner to Secure Jobs 2.0, a multiyear program led by the Melville Charitable Trust and other philanthropic partners to increase the income of families transitioning out of homelessness by connecting them to the education, training, and supports they need to secure and maintain stable employment. In the program’s pilot, 87% of participating households were female headed.

CWEALF urges the BPRC to support H.B. 5220: *An Act Expanding Eligibility in the Care 4 Kids Program to Parents Participating in an Even Start Program or Enrolled in Certain Secondary Education Programs* and H.B. 5222: *An Act Expanding Eligibility in the Care 4 Kids Program for Homeless Families*. Both bills present valuable, necessary steps forward to increasing Care 4 Kids eligibility to those who are most in need, including families who participate in the Secure Jobs program.

CWEALF also urges lawmakers to center the needs of women of color in any legislation that seeks to increase affordable housing, prevent benefits cliffs, and improve access to health care, especially reproductive care.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony tonight. We look forward to working with the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus on issues specific to the economic security of women of color in our state.

i Connecticut Women and Girls Data Platform: <https://womenandgirls.ctdata.org/#Womeninpoverty>