

### **Labor and Public Employees Committee**

Public Testimony of the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF)  
H.B. 6537: *An Act Concerning Paid Sick Days Expansion and Domestic Worker Coverage*  
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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 and marginalized. For forty-seven years, CWEALF has been a leading advocate in the development of policy solutions that advance women's economic security, combat discrimination, and increase gender equity in Connecticut.

CWEALF urges the Committee to support H.B. 6537: *An Act Concerning Paid Sick Days Expansion and Domestic Worker Coverage*, which will strengthen Connecticut's existing paid sick days law to cover all workers, regardless of employer size or occupation title.

#### **Connecticut's Current Paid Sick Leave Law Needs Improvement:**

In 2011, Connecticut became the first state in the nation to require certain employers to provide employees with 40 hours of paid sick time per year. Covered workers use paid sick time under the law to recover from a physical/mental illness or injury, seek medical diagnoses, treatment or preventative care, care for a child or a spouse who is ill or needs medical diagnoses, treatment or preventative care, or to address needs that may arise if the worker is a victim of family violence or sexual assault.

Since 2011, more than 15 states and municipalities have followed Connecticut's lead and adopted their own paid sick leave policies, often in a more inclusive and accessible way. Ten years after the law's passage and in the midst of a global pandemic, Connecticut has not updated to make the law more inclusive and improvement to our paid sick leave statute is past due.

Connecticut's existing paid sick leave law only applies to certain service workers at employers of 50 or more employees. This leaves out a large portion of the hourly workforce employed by small businesses or who do not fit into the narrow definition of "service worker" as outlined in the law. Existing law also exempts non-profits, manufacturers, and temporary or day laborers.<sup>1</sup> Domestic workers, the majority of whom are women of color, are also left out of Connecticut's paid sick leave law.

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<sup>1</sup> [KNOW YOUR RIGHTS: Connecticut Paid Sick Time – A Better Balance](#)

Under Connecticut's current paid sick leave law, workers are only eligible to take the time they accrued once they've worked 680 hours at their single place of employment. This disqualifies workers who have recently started working or work part-time and juggle multiple jobs to make ends meet, to be eligible for the paid sick leave they have already accrued.

Nationwide, access to paid sick leave varies by industry and income status. For example, among private workers, rates of paid sick leave rise with wages: 49% of workers in the lowest wage quartile (\$13.25/hour on average) have access to paid sick leave, compared to 92% in the highest quartile. Less than half of part-time workers, who are disproportionately women and people of color, have access to paid sick leave.<sup>2</sup>

### **Paid Sick Leave and COVID-19:**

Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, gaps in access to paid sick leave forced workers to often forgo critical medical treatment for themselves or their family members and to go to work sick, potentially worsening their illness and infecting co-workers. The pandemic has highlighted the severe disparities in our state's economic systems and exacerbated long-standing racial and gender inequities.

Women and people of color are disproportionately represented in jobs on the frontlines of the pandemic where they are more likely to lack access to paid sick leave and face higher risks of exposure to COVID-19. For example, women in Connecticut comprise 49% of the state's workforce but make up 78% of the healthcare workforce, 67% of the education workforce, and 56% of accommodation and food service industries.<sup>3</sup> These three industries are among those most severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and also often do not provide critical supportive workplace policies such as paid sick leave. COVID-19 also heightens existing threats to the economic security of domestic workers since many, especially those who provide home care or elder care, are considered essential workers and must continue to work through the pandemic or face high rates of unemployment.

In 2020, the federal government took the first steps to initiate a national paid sick leave policy. The Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) provided eligible workers up to two weeks (80 hours) of paid sick leave for COVID-19 specific purposes. Research now shows that the paid leave provisions provided in the FCCRA were successful in "flattening the curve" of COVID-19 transmissions and were associated with approximately 400 fewer cases of COVID-19 per day in states where the law gave workers new access to guaranteed sick leave. While no one specific study is definitive, it does offer significant evidence of the efficacy of paid sick leave in protecting public health.<sup>4</sup>

As Connecticut continues to respond to and recover from the COVID-19 public health crisis, now is the time to examine and improve existing policies that support and uplift the economic security of workers, especially for workers and families of color. House Bill No.

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<sup>2</sup> [Coronavirus Puts a Spotlight on Paid Leave Policies](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Essential Equity: Women, COVID-19 and Rebuilding CT](#)

<sup>4</sup> [COVID-19 Emergency Sick Leave Has Helped Flatten The Curve In The United States](#)

6537 is a critical step to further strengthen Connecticut's stance on paid sick leave and respond to the economic despair faced by too many workers as a result of the pandemic.

### **Paid Sick Leave is Good for Business:**

Healthy workers are essential to a successful business and a thriving economy and are vital to keeping businesses open and safe during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. When workers have access to paid sick leave, they demonstrate increased job satisfaction and morale. This, in turn, leads to increased worker productivity and performance and reduced turnover, which improves a business' bottom line.<sup>5</sup>

Worker turnover is estimated to cost employers 25-200% of a worker's annual salary. Research shows that workers with paid sick leave are less likely to leave their jobs, which saves businesses money on turnover costs such as interviewing and training. After Connecticut's paid sick leave law went into effect in 2021, nearly 30% of surveyed employers reported improved employee morale and more than 20% indicated increased employee motivation or loyalty.<sup>6</sup>

Without access to paid sick leave, workers are more likely to go to work while they are sick, putting their coworkers and communities at risk. As we continue to live and work through a global pandemic, we know that now more than ever, it is critical to stay home when sick. With paid sick leave, our workplaces are healthier, which keeps businesses open and improves their bottom line.

### **Key Components of H.B. 6537:**

House Bill No. 6537: *An Act Concerning Paid Sick Leave Expansion and Domestic Worker Coverage* will strengthen Connecticut's existing paid sick leave law and provide critical relief to workers during and after the COVID-19 crisis. House Bill No. 6537 will:

- **Cover all workers:** H.B. 6357 removes the employer size threshold and job classification list outlined in existing law and requires all employers, regardless of size or industry, to provide up to 40 hours of paid sick time to their employees per year. This includes domestic workers, who are left out of the majority of workplace protections and continue to work on the frontlines of the pandemic.
- **Reduce the waiting period to accrue and use paid sick leave:** House Bill No. 6537 eliminates the waiting period for an employee to use the paid sick days they've accrued from 680 hours to immediately after the commencement of employment. This is critical to part-time workers who often work multiple jobs to make ends meet and must wait to be eligible to use the paid sick time they've already accrued.
- **Include all types of family structures and relationships:** Under H.B. 6537, workers can use paid sick days to care for a spouse, child of any age, grandparent, grandchild, parent, sibling, and any individual related to the employee by blood or affinity who is the

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<sup>5</sup> [Paid Sick Leave Is Good For Business – A Better Balance](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Good for Buisness? Connecticut Paid Sick Leave Law](#)

equivalent of family. An inclusive definition of family is critical to workers who care for loved ones who do not fit within the traditional family model of child or spouse. The definition of family member included in H.B. 6537 is representative of the reality of today's workers and their families and is especially critical to LGBTQ workers who often have varied family forms and need paid leave that allows them to care for their loved one.

- **Provide pandemic-related sick leave as well as an additional 80 hours of COVID-19 specific leave:** House Bill No. 6537 allows sick time to be used when a worker's place of work or child's school/place of care is closed by public health officials for a public health emergency. This language takes into consideration and plans ahead of other public health crises that may arise after COVID-19 is no longer an imminent threat. House Bill No. 6537 also includes language similar to the original provisions of the Families First Coronavirus Relief Act that expired at the end of 2020 and provides an additional 80 hours of paid sick time for COVID-19 related purposes so long as there is a federal tax credit.

Women and communities of color are already experiencing the most severe economic fallout from the pandemic, and inequities in access to critical workplace policies like paid sick leave only deepens the impact of COVID-19 on their economic security.

CWEALF urges the Committee and lawmakers to advance H.B. 6537: *An Act Concerning Paid Sick Days Expansion and Domestic Worker Coverage* to strengthen Connecticut's existing paid sick leave law and provide important protections to workers on the frontlines of the pandemic who risk their health and the health of their families every day to earn a paycheck and keep our economy running.

Thank you.