

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

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

S.B. 765: *An Act Ensuring Fair and Equal Pay for Equal Work*

Submitted by: Madeline Granato, Policy Manager and Lauren Pease, MSW Intern

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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, especially and professional lives. Since 1973, CWEALF is a leading advocate for policy solutions to enhance women's economic security and combat the gender wage gap.

CWEALF urges you to support S.B. 765: *An Act Ensuring Fair and Equal Pay for Equal Work*.

Women currently make up nearly half of the Connecticut workforce and are a growing number of breadwinners to their families. However, they continue to earn significantly less than their male counterparts. Women in our state earn, on average, \$0.83 to every dollar paid to men.<sup>1</sup> This disparity is greater for women of color: African American women earn \$0.57 and Latina women earn \$0.47 compared to every dollar earned by white, non-Hispanic men.<sup>1</sup>

On average, women lose an estimated \$5.5 billion to the wage gap<sup>3</sup>. Overall, women lose \$403,440 over the course of a 40-year career because of the gender wage gap<sup>4</sup>. These numbers continue to increase for women of color. Latinas may face losing and estimated \$1,056,120, while Black women may lose \$867,920.<sup>4</sup>

Elimination of the gender wage gap is critical to boost families out of poverty. In Connecticut, 5.5% of working women live in poverty. If the gender wage gap did not exist, this number would drop to as low as 2.4%. The current poverty rate for single working mothers in CT is 24.4%. This number would drop to 14.6% if they received pay equal to their male counterparts.

Women make up almost half of the workforce, and if they were to receive equal pay, the United States could produce an estimated \$512.6 billion in additional income.<sup>2</sup>

Last legislative session, CWEALF was proud to work closely with a bipartisan group of legislators to advocate for the passage of P.A. 18-8 to prohibit the use of salary history in the job application process, a practice that perpetuates the gender wage gap. CWEALF was also proud to serve on the Governor's Wage Gap Task Force in 2013-2014 and support efforts to prohibit employer bans on salary discussions among employees in 2015.

1. National Women's Law Center. Retrieved from <https://nwlc.org/state/connecticut/>
2. Institute for Women's Policy Research. Retrieved from <https://iwpr.org/publications/impact-equal-pay-poverty-economy/>
3. Connecticut Women and the Wage Gap. Retrieved from <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/workplace/fair-pay/4-2016-ct-wage-gap.pdf>
4. The Lifetime Wage Gap, State by State. Retrieved from <https://nwlc.org/resources/the-lifetime-wage-gap-state-by-state/>

The General Assembly must continue to combat the wage gap by requiring employers to pay their employees equal wages for comparable work, or work that requires substantially similar skill, effort, and responsibility that is performed under similar working conditions. This standard is included in recent pay equity legislation in New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Oregon.

CWEALF also recommends that legislation require employers to examine their pay practices through self-audits and take active steps to address wage discrepancies. In order to create meaningful and sustainable change, the private sector must continue to acknowledge pay discrepancies in their own places of work and take the appropriate steps to remedy these differences.

The gender wage gap will not close until lawmakers pass additional protections and policies that achieve economic security for women and families in our state. This includes the passage and implementation of a comprehensive system of paid family and medical leave, increase of the minimum wage to \$15 per hour, and expansion of sexual harassment trainings and protections in workplaces across the state.

CWEALF urges the Committee to support S.B. 765 and looks forward to continuing to work with lawmakers on both sides of the aisle to pass this important legislation this year.