



**So you're interested in policy, but don't know where to start?
Don't worry, this Toolkit will help you through the process!**

What is CWEALF?

The Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF) is a statewide, nonprofit organization that advocates for and empowers *women and girls, especially those who are underserved or marginalized. We work to achieve an equitable society where women and girls thrive through legal education, public policy, and women's advancement and leadership. [Click here to learn more about our organization!](#)

*CWEALF's work supports women and girls who identify as cisgender and transgender, and non-binary individuals, as well as people of all marginalized gender identities systemically and historically oppressed by those in power.

What do we do at CWEALF?

CWEALF was created in 1973 as a women's law firm. We are one of the oldest still operating women's rights organizations in the nation. Over the years we have evolved tremendously. Along with our policy and advocacy work – which we'll dive into later – we provide free legal information through our Information & Referral (I&R) service on family matters, workplace issues and discrimination.

If you or someone you know would like to use our Information & Referral (I&R) service, [please click here to be redirected to our online contact form](#) or call our hotline at (860) 524-0601 to speak to a trained staff member or volunteer!

What does CWEALF's policy work look like?

CWEALF's Legal Education Program helps us understand the needs of women and girls in the state and our Public Policy and Advocacy work allows us to fight to make change happen. CWEALF advocates for the economic security of women and their families. We are a leading voice for equal pay in our state. In addition, CWEALF serves as the Chair of the Campaign for Paid Family Leave in Connecticut!

If you or someone you know is interested in learning about your rights in the workplace throughout the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, please click here to be redirected to our know-your-rights guide.

What is Women's Economic Security and why is it important?

Women's Economic Security is the ability for women to have stable income or other financial resources to support themselves and their families.

The COVID-19 pandemic has really shown us how much work needs to be done in our state. Women, especially women of color, have felt the most severe financial, social, and emotional impacts of the public health crisis these past two years and will continue to do so until we pass laws that center them in the fight for equity and justice.

Now more than ever, it's critical to use YOUR voice to influence change in our state! CWEALF created this toolkit for you to learn more about the power of your voice to make changes that will improve the economic security of women across the state. Together, we can make Connecticut a safer and more prosperous place to live for women and their families. [Read more about CWEALF's 2022 legislative priorities here.](#)

Now let's talk about how you can lift your voice in this year's legislative session...but first, here's important information to help you navigate this toolkit!

Definitions:

- **Economic Security:** the condition of having stable income or other financial resources to support yourself and/or your family.
- **Legislative Session:** a period of time during the year in which the government comes together to debate and pass laws in the state where you live.
- **District:** a region or area of the state where you live.
- **Legislature:** a body of the government that passes laws in the state where you live in.
- **Legislator:** a person who is elected to represent an area of the state in order to make laws.
- **Constituent:** a voter who elects a person to represent them. For example, you are a constituent to your legislator because you elected them into office and they represent you.
- **Senate:** a branch of the legislature that is made up of 36 members. They are elected by the people of Connecticut to serve for a two-year term.
- **House of Representatives:** a branch of the legislature that is made up of 151 members. They are elected by the people of Connecticut to serve for a two-year term.
- **Committee:** groups of legislators who are chosen to debate and vote on bills that are based on specific topics associated with that committee. For example, the Housing Committee focuses on bills associated with landlords, tenants, evictions and everything else related to the housing sector.
- **Bill:** a draft of a proposed law.
- **Public Hearing:** a meeting held during the legislative session where legislators get to hear opinions of members of the public on specific bills.
- **Testimony:** a spoken or written statement you share with elected officials to share your story in support or against a bill.



Let's break down the basics...

WHAT is the Connecticut General Assembly?

- The Connecticut General Assembly (CGA) is the state legislature of Connecticut.

WHO works at the Connecticut General Assembly?

- The CGA is composed of 151 members of the House of Representatives and 36 members of the Senate, who each represent a specific district of the state. They are all referred to as legislators!
- The job of every legislator is to make laws in our state. Senators serve in the Senate and State Representatives serve in the House of Representatives. Every legislator is elected by the people of Connecticut to serve for a two-year term. The sizes of the geographic areas they represent are different because Senate districts are bigger than House [districts](#)! Also, some towns and cities have more than one district because of their population size. That is why some communities have only one State Representative but others have two or more.

WHAT are they in charge of doing?

- The CGA's job is to pass laws necessary for the wellbeing of our state and its residents. You elect them into office during the election process every two years so that means that they work for you! Each year the legislature meets to vote on different legislation which directly impacts all of us in the state. This is called the legislative session. This year, the legislative session starts on February 9th, 2022 and goes through May 4th, 2022.

WHERE are they located?

There are two places where you'll probably be able to find legislators in Connecticut.

- The Legislative Office Building (also known as the LOB) is located at 300 Capitol Avenue in Hartford. This is the building where most of the first business of the legislative session takes place, including committee meetings and public hearings. Most legislators have their offices in the LOB.
- The State Capitol is right next to the LOB and it's the easiest to recognize because it has a gold dome at the top! This building is located right next to the LOB at 210 Capitol Avenue in Hartford and is where the House of Representatives and the State Senate debate and vote on potential laws. The Governor's and Lieutenant Governor's offices are also located in the State Capitol Building.



HOW TO:

NAVIGATE THE CONNECTICUT STATE LEGISLATURE

Both the LOB and the State Capitol Building are limited to the public right now because of the COVID-19 pandemic. This means that most of this year's legislative session will likely be on Zoom!

WHY do we need them?

- In order to balance power in our state, we need to have a legislature to share governmental power, duties, and responsibilities. Along with passing laws, the CGA approves the state's budget which means they decide where the state's money goes and who it helps.

HOW do we keep track of what they're doing?

- The CGA website provides up to date information about what's happening at the legislature, proposed bills, events, and contact information for each State Representative and Senator.

The CGA website is a great resource!

Let's take a look at the main page which has great tools to follow the legislative session.



HOW TO:

NAVIGATE THE CONNECTICUT STATE LEGISLATURE

The screenshot shows the Connecticut General Assembly website. At the top, four yellow boxes with arrows point to specific features: 'Find your legislator' points to the 'Representation' dropdown menu; 'Explore committees' points to the 'Committees' dropdown menu; 'Search the bulletin' points to the 'Bulletin (11/13)' link in the 'CGA Daily Records' section; and 'Look up a bill & track a bill' points to the 'Bill Info' dropdown menu. A red note states 'Please note: The Capitol Complex is currently closed.' Below this is a video player for the Legislative Office Building & State Capitol, with a 'Broadcast Media' sidebar containing 'House Stream', 'Senate Stream', and 'CT-N' options. The 'CGA Daily Records for Thursday, November 19, 2020' section is visible at the bottom.

1. [Find your legislator.](#)

Do you know who represents you at the State Capitol? Each district has at least one State Representative and one Senator representing them. Find out who those legislators are based on where you live, which bills they've supported or voted against, and other information on their leadership roles!

2. [Look up a bill.](#)

Use the Bill by Subject function to find bills focused on issues you care about or that concern you or your community. Search with keywords to learn more about the current bills up for discussion at the legislature this session.

3. [Track a bill.](#)

Use the Bill Tracking function to see how a specific bill you're interested in is moving in the Connecticut General Assembly. Follow the path of a bill throughout



HOW TO:

NAVIGATE THE CONNECTICUT STATE LEGISLATURE

the legislative session to learn firsthand how a bill becomes a law! Use the “track a bill” function to look up bills in past years’ legislative sessions too. For example: search “S.B. 1” from the year 2019 and check out the path to passage for paid family and medical leave!

4. [Explore committees.](#)

Legislators have to serve on at least one committee in the legislature. Each committee focuses on different topics, for example, the Housing Committee focuses on all legislation that has to do with landlords, tenants, evictions, and other components of the housing sector. There are 26 committees in the Connecticut General Assembly. Each committee includes members from the House of Representatives and State Senate. Bills must first be raised and passed by a committee before they can be up for a vote in the House of Representatives or Senate.

Committees of the CGA: *Aging; Appropriations; Banking; Children; Commerce; Education; Energy and Technology; Environment; Executive and Legislative Nominations; Finance, Revenue and Bonding; General Law; Government Administration and Elections; Higher Education and Employment; Internship; Housing; Human Services; Insurance and Real Estate; Judiciary; Labor and Public Employees; Joint Committee on Legislative Management; Planning and Development; Public Health; Public Safety and Security; Regulation Review; Transportation; and Veterans' Affairs*

5. [Search the bulletin.](#)

The bulletin is your daily guide to the legislature! The bulletin is updated daily and includes information on weekly legislative events, public hearings, and committee meetings. The bulletin also includes critical information about public hearings, including how to submit written testimony and where to sign up to testify. As the legislature operates virtually, the bulletin will also include links to “tune in” to legislative events through online platforms.



Now you know the details but how do you know what to advocate for?

Taking the first step in that process might not feel easy but we're here to help! It's important to note that this isn't a one-size-fits all model. Your advocacy journey is a personal one and will change and evolve in its own unique way. Here are some tips to help make that process a little bit easier:

- **Step 1:** Start with thinking through your experiences or the many identities you hold. Ask yourself these questions: "what is something I'm passionate about?" and "what do I want to see change in my life or in my community?" Advocacy starts with something that you truly believe in and care about.
- **Step 2:** Next, prepare yourself on the topic or issue you're focusing on. Try to stay informed although you're the expert of your own story and experience. However, doing some research can help you get a sense of why this issue is important on a larger scale. For example, who else does this issue impact and how? What does this issue look like across your whole community?
- **Step 3:** Finally, get connected, involved, and use your voice! Sometimes we think we're alone in this process, but usually there are other people, groups, and organizations already focusing on the topic that interests you! Connect with them and see how you can help the cause!

Why is sharing your story important?

By sharing your story and raising YOUR voice, you build the case for women's economic security or other issues you care about here in Connecticut. Stories put a face and a voice behind something that can otherwise be difficult to understand in a bill. It's really important for legislators to see the human side of an issue and the impact it has on communities throughout the state! When you share your story, whether with a legislator, or your own network, it allows listeners or readers to understand the difficult reality facing Connecticut women who lack economic security.

When you share your story, with a legislator or anyone else, remember:

- Your story is your own and cannot be wrong. It is YOUR personal experience. Your experience is so important to the lawmaking process and it has value and meaning.
- If you're sharing your story with a lawmaker about a specific issue, you don't need to know all the answers! Just have a clear "ask" in mind (ex: please support affordable housing, raising the minimum wage, etc.) and be prepared to explain how this issue has affected you.



HOW TO: SHARE YOUR STORY

Tips for *building* and *sharing* your story:

1. Write your story in **chronological order**, meaning the order that it happened. This helps you remember your experience more clearly and helps your audience follow along!
2. Paint a realistic picture. How would resolving this issue benefit you, your family, or your community?
3. Include a specific ask or action item. Consider who is your audience and what do you want them to do?
4. Don't be afraid to be genuine and show your emotions but be aware of your triggers. If something is really traumatizing, take a step back and take care of yourself before continuing.
5. Share with people you are **comfortable** with to start, and then branch out to other networks as you start to feel safer sharing your experience.

How can I share my story with legislators?

Anyone can be an advocate. Sometimes it's as easy as picking up the phone. Call your State Representative and/or State Senator to tell them why women's economic security or another issue is important to you. You can also speak with legislators at town hall meetings, likely virtually because of the pandemic. Visit their official website (through cga.ct.gov or by searching their name) or their Facebook page to view their upcoming events!

A few tips for calling your elected official:

1. Tell them your name and the town you're calling from.
2. Explain why you're calling them. Make sure to ask your legislator their position on the issue you're calling about. Sometimes, a legislative aide will answer the phone instead of the legislator. A legislative aide is a person who supports a legislator throughout the legislative session.
3. Request a written response to your phone call or a phone call back if you did not speak to your legislative member. If the legislator asks for more information, be sure to follow-up as soon as possible after your conversation.
4. Thank the person who took the phone call for their time and consideration.
5. Make a note for yourself about the day and time you called and what you talked about. This will be helpful in case you need to refer back to it.

Sample Phone Script or Email:

"Hello Representative/Senator _____, my name is [YOUR NAME] and I strongly support [INSERT ISSUE AND REASON FOR YOUR SUPPORT - IF YOU HAVE A PERSONAL



STORY, BRIEFLY STATE IT HERE - see previous page for tips!] I hope you will support [INSERT ISSUE] this legislative session. Thank you.”

How can I meet with my legislator?

Meeting with your State Representative and/or State Senator can be an intimidating experience but it's critical for them to hear about issues that are affecting their constituents and their communities. Taking time to prepare for the meeting will alleviate some of the stress and will help you be ready for the conversation as much as you can be!

Before the Meeting:

- 1. Call or email your legislator's office and set up a meeting.** Follow the directions on the page with the information on the CGA website to find your legislator online. To schedule a meeting with your State Senator, click on the “Email & Contact” tab on their website and call the legislative aide listed, who will schedule the meeting. To schedule a meeting with your State Representative, call the number listed on their home page in the right hand corner and ask to speak with the legislative aide for that Representative.
- 2. Schedule the meeting in advance.** Legislators usually have a lot of things going on at once, particularly during the legislative session. It's helpful to schedule your meeting 2-4 weeks in advance.
- 3. Invite a few friends.** Bringing 2 or 3 constituents along with you to the meeting helps to show strength in numbers. Just make sure to let the legislative aide know ahead of time how many people you plan to bring!
- 4. Do your research.** Before the meeting, it is incredibly important that you research your legislators to see what position they take on certain issues, and what committees they are on. Doing this will give you a better sense of who they are as a person.

During the Meeting:

- 1. Encourage a specific action during the meeting.** For example, if you would like the legislator to vote for or against a specific bill, co-sponsor a bill, or get more support for an issue from other legislators, be clear and specific about what you'd like them to do!
- 2. Use facts and concrete examples to support your points.** You can do this by sharing a personal story on an issue that can resonate with your legislator or by



HOW TO: SHARE YOUR STORY

bringing a fact sheet to give to them before leaving the meeting. Feel free to contact CWEALF or another advocacy organization for information to bring with you.

- 3. Thank them for meeting with you.** It's important to end the meeting by thanking the legislator for taking time out of their day to listen to your concerns.

After the Meeting:

Follow up! Remember to follow up with an email or letter reiterating the points that were made in the meeting. This is also the time to answer any questions you didn't know the answer to during the meeting or to send any other information that they requested.

How can I share my story with a bigger audience? PUBLIC HEARINGS!

Public hearings are official meetings held during the first months of the legislative session where members of the public are invited to give their opinions on bills proposed in a Committee. Public hearings present valuable opportunities to make YOUR voice heard before a bill becomes a law. Unfortunately, the hearings can also be very long and can be hard to attend if you have to work or do other things during the times they are scheduled.

Visit www.cga.ct.gov to track legislation and find out when a bill you're interested about will be up for a public hearing. The CGA also provides a great guide to making your voice heard in the public hearing process here:

<https://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/Content/YourVoice.asp>.

Before COVID-19, public hearings were held in-person at the LOB but now they are done virtually. There are two ways you can testify. You can submit written testimony if you can't attend the public hearing or you can provide oral testimony at the public hearing. Remember to check the daily bulletin for up to date information on public hearings, including how to sign up to testify or where to submit written testimony. The CGA must provide the public at least 5 days notice prior to a public hearing.

Tips for Testifying Virtually:

- Check out the Bulletin on cga.ct.gov for information on a public hearing that interests you and follow the link provided in the description to sign up virtually.
- After you sign up, keep on the lookout for an email with the link to participate and more information. The speaking order for all public hearings is determined through a lottery process. Make sure to check the Committee's page on



cga.ct.gov at the time provided in the Bulletin's description of the public hearing for the order of speakers to know where you are in line!

- Once the hearing begins, use the Zoom link provided to you by the Committee to wait for your turn to testify. You'll be placed in a waiting room until your name is called.
- If you're using computer audio, make sure you have a microphone on your computer if you need to talk. If not, use the call-in feature on a cell phone or a landline. If you have audio problems, switch to the dial in option. If you're using your cell phone, try to stay in one place where you have a good signal!

How to Submit Written Testimony:

- Can't make it to testify in person? Check the bulletin for information on where and when to email public hearing testimony before the hearing.
- Make sure to clearly state which bills you are testifying on. If you are submitting testimony on more than one bill, it's okay to combine the testimony into one document. Just be sure to clarify which section applies to which bill!
- Follow CWEALF or other advocacy organizations for sample testimony templates, additional guidance, and talking points.

What to Expect at the Public Hearing:

- The first hour of the hearing is typically reserved for state officials, including members of the legislature. After that, each speaker is given only 3 minutes of testimony. Speaking from your own experience is most persuasive.
- When you are called to testify, start by introducing yourself with your name and your town, and then the number and title of the bill you are addressing, and whether you support or oppose the bill.
- After your three minutes, committee members may ask you questions. Answer briefly and accurately. If you don't know the answer, no problem! Just let them know you'll follow up after the hearing with the information they're looking for.



Sample description and instructions for a virtual public hearing (via the CGA's Bulletin):

COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2021

The Committee on Children will hold a public hearing on **Thursday, February 18, 2021 at 1:00 P.M.** via **Zoom**.¹ The public hearing can be viewed via [YouTube Live](#). In addition, the public hearing may be recorded and broadcast live on [CT-N.com](#).² Individuals who wish to testify via Zoom must register using the [On-line Testimony Registration Form](#).³ The registration form must contain the name of the person who will be testifying. A unique email address must be provided for each person registered to speak. Registration will close on February 17, 2021 at 3:00 P.M.⁴ Speaker order of approved registrants will be listed in a randomized order and posted on the Committee for Children website on February 17, 2021 at 7:00 P.M. under Public Hearing Testimony.⁵ If you do not have internet access, you may provide testimony via telephone. To register to testify by phone, call the Phone Registrant Line at (860) 240-0370 to leave your contact information.⁶ Please email written testimony to KIDTestimony@cga.ct.gov in PDF format.⁷ Testimony should clearly state testifier name and bill they are testifying on. The Committee requests that testimony be limited to matters related to the items on the Agenda. The first hour of the hearing is reserved for Elected Officials. Speakers will be limited to three minutes of testimony.⁸ The Committee encourages witnesses to submit a written statement and to condense oral testimony to a summary of that statement. All public hearing testimony, written and spoken, is public information. As such, it will be made available on the CGA website and index by internet search engines.

Key:

1. Date and time of the hearing
2. How to stream a hearing - link to YouTube channel and CT-N.com
3. Link to online registration form to sign up to give verbal testimony
4. Date and time when registration to testify verbally CLOSES
5. Directions on where to find the speaking order for the public hearing, determined by a lottery process
6. Directions on how to register to testify via phone
7. Committee email address to submit written testimony



8. Reminder: speakers are limited to three minutes of testimony each!

I have social media accounts...can I share my story there too?

The short answer is ABSOLUTELY! Social media is a great way to engage more people on issues you care about, including your own network of friends, families, and colleagues. Here are some ways you can engage in policy & advocacy on social media:

1. Share your story.

Introduce issues about women's economic security or other issues you care about by sharing your experience with the topic, why you are concerned or why you support or oppose a bill you're interested in. Sharing your own story will make followers more likely to read the information in full. Consider using the different functions of social media like polls and comment sections to encourage followers to share their own experiences.

2. Create engaging graphics.

Use color and interesting images to grab the attention of your followers. Diversify your content with videos and audio. Limit the use of words in your graphics and keep it to 1-2 key lines. You can always add more detailed information in the caption.

3. Give action steps.

Clearly introduce the topic and educate your followers on the importance of women's economic security or other issues that are important to you. Always provide an easy way for followers to engage with the subject. For example, include links to online petitions, accounts to follow, websites to contact legislators, and links for events to attend.

4. Engage with other activists.

Follow accounts of activists and organizations that support women's economic security and other steps for equality. Boost others' content by liking, retweeting and sharing posts!



5. Use CWEALF resources.

Share posts created by @CWEALF and link to CWEALF's 2022 Legislative Agenda or other helpful materials. Check out [CWEALF's policy page](#) for additional information and resources. Encourage followers to sign up for the [CWEALF mailing list](#) to stay informed!

Resources, Talking Points & Fact Sheets:

- [CWEALF's 2022 Legislative Agenda](#)

Resources on the legislative process in Connecticut:

- [Connecticut Legislative History](#)
- ["I'm Just a Bill" by Schoolhouse Rock](#)
- [How a Bill Becomes a Law in Connecticut](#)
- [Navigating the Legislative Process](#) (CT Health Policy Project)

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