

Human Services Committee

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

S.B. 197: *An Act Concerning Temporary Family Assistance*

H.B. 5226: *An Act Limiting State Recovery of Public Assistance Payments*

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The Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF) is a statewide nonprofit that advocates for and empowers women and girls in Connecticut, especially those who are underserved or marginalized. For forty-eight years, CWEALF has been a leading advocate for policies that advance the economic security of women across our state and promote gender equity in the workplace.

Through CWEALF's Legal Education Program, we provide information, education, referrals, and bilingual advocacy to the Connecticut community to ensure that all individuals in our state have access to legal justice. The majority of CWEALF's clients are low-income women with at least one dependent.

We urge the committee to support S.B. 197: *An Act Concerning Temporary Family Assistance*, and H.B. 5226: *An Act Limiting State Recovery of Public Assistance Payments*.

Prior to COVID, 9.9% of women in Connecticut lived in poverty, including 11.1% of Asian women, 13.9% of Black women, 22.8% of Latina women, and 17.8% of Native women.¹ More than 170,000 family households in Connecticut are headed by women, and roughly 24% of those families earn incomes that fall below the poverty level.² According to United Way's ALICE report, 48% of women under the age 65 earn incomes above the poverty threshold but below what is needed to afford household necessities including child care, transportation, food, and health care.³

The COVID-19 pandemic has also created a "shecession", or an economic downturn where job and income losses are disproportionately affecting women more than their male counterparts. "[Essential Equity: Women, COVID-19 and Rebuilding Connecticut](#)" illustrates that since the beginning of the pandemic, women have filed the majority of initial and continuing unemployment claims. Women of color have been even more affected by the pandemic: more than 1 in 3 of initial unemployment claims filed by women were by women of color.

¹ National Women's Law Center. Women and Poverty, State by State. 2018. Retrieved from: <https://nwlc.org/resources/women-and-poverty-state-state/>

² See note 1

³ <http://womenandgirls.ctdata.org/>

CWEALF supports S.B. 197 which will increase the amount of time a person can receive Temporary Family Assistance (TFA) from 21 to 60 months. Connecticut's current 21 month limit on TFA is among the shortest in the country, second only to Arizona (12 month time limit) and far shorter than any of our neighboring states. The short time limit on receiving cash assistance makes the program inaccessible to people who need the support.

Twenty one months is rarely enough time to address the multiple barriers that often prohibit steady employment. Parents need more time to acquire the skills and education needed to secure a job with livable wages that support their families in the long term. Research shows that parents leaving TANF cash assistance often obtain employment, but not in jobs that could support a family. Once they are working, it is difficult for working parents to find the support, time and funding necessary to participate in education and long-term training programs needed to advance in the workforce and earn a livable wage.

We support S.B. 197 as a long overdue and necessary improvement to Connecticut's TFA program that not only aligns us with our neighbors, but also better supports families in need of cash assistance.

We also support H.B. 5226: *An Act Limiting State Recovery of Public Assistance Payments* which will limit recovery of public assistance payments by the state except as required under federal law or a court-ordered support payment and makes an important improvement to the legislation that passed during the 2021 legislative session.