

LABOR AND PUBLIC EMPLOYEES COMMITTEE

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

H.B. 5355 An Act Concerning Sexual Violence Posting In The Workplace

Submitted by: Brandi A. Kennedy, MSW Policy Practice Intern

March 8, 2022

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.

We urge the committee to support H.B. 5355: *An Act Concerning Sexual Violence Posting In The Workplace*.

Sexual assault, harassment and abuse are prevalent and widespread problems that continue to plague Connecticut workplaces. These types of violence impact across race, age, gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, disability and knows no boundaries. Workplace violence is common and often rarely reported; however, of those who have reported, 38% of women report they were sexually harassed while at work.¹ Furthermore, 1 in 7 women sought out new job assignments, changed jobs, or quit due to sexual harassment and assault.² Sexual violence in the workplace impacts every aspect of a survivor's life- it is real and damaging- leaving many survivors with lasting psychological symptoms such as PTSD, depression, stress and anxiety.

Due to the under reporting of sexual violence in the workplace, it is vital that Connecticut remains proactive in its approach to supporting survivors. According to research conducted on this matter, 60% of women say they have experienced unwanted sexual attention, sexual coercion, sexually crude contact, or sexist comments in the workplace.³ Yet over 85% of individuals who experience sexual violence never file a formal legal charge, and approximately 70% of employees never complain internally.⁴

The Connecticut Department of Public Health issued the Sexual Violence Prevention Plan in 2010 that outlines the prevention spectrum and highlights that efforts need to take place simultaneously on all levels. These levels include policy, changing organizational practices,

fostering coalitions and networks, educating providers, promoting community education, and strengthening individual knowledge and skills.⁵

CWEALF urges the committee to support H.B. 5355 as the bill incorporates all of the prevention levels referenced by the Connecticut Department of Public Health. Section one of the bill organizes the commission into a division of affirmative action for monitoring and contract compliance, a division of discriminatory practice complaints, employs legal staff and a commission of legal counsel, requires postings by an employer, employment agency, or labor organizations, of such notices regarding statutory provisions as the commission provides.

Furthermore, by increasing awareness about domestic violence and the free resources available across Connecticut, the proposed training within this bill benefits state employees experiencing abuse both at home or in the workplace. Allowing employers to post information about sexual violence serves as a cost-effective approach and could save the state millions of dollars as businesses can face financial costs associated with harassment complaints in addition to decreased employee productivity, increased employee turnover rate, and reputational harm.⁶

1 <https://www.nsvrc.org/ending-sexual-assault-and-harassment-workplace>

2 see note 1

3 see note 1

4 see note 1

5 https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/Departments-and-Agencies/DPH/dph/state_health_planning/dphplans/sexviolprevplan200917pdf.pdf

6 see note 1