



Calling All Candidates!

2022 Candidate Guide to Women's Economic Security
Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund



CONNECTICUT WOMEN'S EDUCATION & LEGAL FUND (CWEALF)

WHO WE ARE

CWEALF is a statewide, nonprofit that uses a justice and equity lens to advocate for under-resourced, marginalized women and girls in Connecticut. We work to close the civil legal justice gap and to create policy that advances women's economic security.

Learn more about CWEALF and our services by visiting our website at <https://www.cwealf.org/>

WHY DID WE CREATE THIS GUIDE?

This is a tool for candidates to learn more about important issues that are critical to women's economic security in our state. We must work together to address the racial and gender disparities exacerbated throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to make Connecticut a more equitable place to live for all women and their families.

Across the state, [47.8%](#) of women under 65 do not have an income sufficient to cover household essentials. Women make up nearly half of the state's workforce and continue to be a growing number of breadwinners to their families; however, 29% of female-headed households in Connecticut live in poverty.

The recovery from the COVID-19 crisis has been uneven, especially for women and women of color. [Research shows](#) 579,000 fewer women were in the labor force in July 2022 than in February 2020 and make up more than 88% of workers who left the labor force since the pandemic began. Women have also gained the majority of jobs added in the leisure, hospitality and retail sectors. While these gains are a positive for the overall unemployment rate, many jobs in these sectors have low wages and unpredictable hours and provide minimal benefits like paid sick leave.

Connecticut's economy cannot operate at its full potential unless we remove the barriers that impede women from achieving economic security. To unravel decades of systemic racism, sexism and economic injustice, we must center the needs of women, specifically women of color, in all critical policy decisions.

CWEALF staff are available to discuss these issues more in-depth.

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Please note:
CWEALF does
not endorse
candidates.



CWEALF POLICY PRIORITY

PAID SICK DAYS

Paid sick days provide short term time off, usually hourly or daily, to recover from an illness like a cold or the flu, care for a loved one, seek preventive care such as attending a doctor's appointment, or receive assistance relating to domestic or sexual violence.

Paid sick days ensure that workers do not lose their income when they need to take a day or two off from work. When a worker is forced to take time off from work that is unpaid, they lose earnings that are otherwise spent on groceries, gas, utilities or rent payments. Access to paid sick days are also important to a community's health: research shows workers without paid sick days are also more likely to seek emergency room care and are more likely to spread their illness to their coworkers or customers.

QUICK FACTS: WHY ARE PAID SICK DAYS IMPORTANT?

- Pre-pandemic, low-wage workers and workers of color were less likely than higher wage and white workers to have access to paid sick leave. Nationally, nearly [7 in 10](#) of the lowest wage workers do not have access to even a single paid sick day.
- The costs of taking unpaid leave can [negatively impact](#) a worker's household budget: lost wages can equal an entire budget for groceries, gas, utilities, rent or mortgage payments.
- Research shows that access to paid sick days [reduces visits to the emergency room](#), especially among Medicaid patients. Emergency room care often replaces routine medical appointments - which are inaccessible to workers without paid sick days - and leads to higher health insurance costs for businesses and higher medical expenses for workers.
- Spreading illness to the public is much more costly to a business than providing paid sick time: in general, worker turnover is estimated to cost employers [25-200%](#) of a worker's annual salary. Nationally, the common cold alone costs [\\$16.6 billion](#) in productivity loss. Absenteeism caused by the introduction of flu-like illness at work is estimated to cost employers up to [111 million workdays](#) per year.



CWEALF POLICY PRIORITY

PAID SICK DAYS

CURRENT CONNECTICUT LAW:

- Connecticut was the first state in the nation in 2011 to pass legislation that requires certain employers to provide paid sick days to their employees.
- Under Connecticut's existing law, eligible workers use paid sick days for their own or their child or spouse's illness, injury or health condition; to seek preventive care or medical diagnosis, care or treatment for their own, their child up to the age of 18 or spouse's mental or physical illness, injury or health condition; or receive assistance related to domestic or sexual violence.
- Connecticut's law applies to employers of 50 or more in certain service occupations. "[Service worker](#)" includes restaurant workers, home health aides, retail workers, and others. Businesses of less than 50 employees, as well as certain nonprofits and manufacturers, are exempt from the law.
- Covered workers are eligible to use paid sick time after they've worked 680 hours for their employer and an average of 10 hours/week in the most recent quarter.

Carve outs in Connecticut's current law have made us an outlier among the more than [20 states and municipalities](#) that have passed similar policies. Research from the National Partnership for Women and Families indicates that [more than 88% of Connecticut's workforce](#) is not guaranteed paid sick time under our current law.*

POLICY RECOMMENDATION:

We support legislation to strengthen our existing paid sick days law. Legislation should:

1. [Cover all workers](#) by removing the employer size threshold and job classification list outlined in the law and requiring all employers, regardless of size or industry, to provide up to 40 hours of accrued paid sick time to all of their employees.
2. [Eliminate the waiting period to take a paid sick day](#) so that workers can start using their sick time immediately after the commencement of employment.
3. [Include all types of family structures and relationships](#) by allowing workers to take paid sick days to care for a child of any age, as well as their chosen family. Legislation should also include time to care for a family member who experiences family violence or sexual assault.
4. [Protect against future pandemics](#) and other public health emergencies by allowing paid sick time to be used when a worker's place of work or child's school/place of care is closed by public officials.

CWEALF POLICY PRIORITY

FAIR WORK WEEK

In Connecticut, hourly workers - many earning poverty wages - struggle to earn a stable income because of unpredictable work schedules. Workers are often forced to go to work with little notice, maintain open availability for “on-call” shifts without any guarantee of work and have their shifts canceled at the last minute.

When workers cannot predict their hours or pay from day to day, they are often unable to secure child care or transportation, attend doctors appointments or classes, or plan for their future. Unpredictable scheduling also negatively affects workers’ mental health through increased stress and anxiety of not knowing when they’ll receive a paycheck.

QUICK FACTS: WHY IS FAIR WORK WEEK IMPORTANT?

- About 250,000 hourly workers in Connecticut, the majority of whom are people of color and women with children, would benefit from fair work week legislation.
- Routine preventive care, including annual check ups or pediatric appointments, is often scheduled long before hourly workers receive their schedules. On-call shift scheduling often prevents women from being able to make appointments or forces them to cancel entirely, which may delay follow-up treatments or diagnoses.
- Unpredictable or on-call scheduling can also undermine children’s well-being. Inadequate income and constantly fluctuating work hours increase stress on parents and children alike, which also adversely affects children’s development and make maintaining stable, high-quality child care nearly impossible.
- In a [survey of hourly workers](#) in Connecticut, 50% reported their work schedule does not provide enough flexibility to handle family needs and 71% reported their work schedule causes extra stress for them and their family.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION:

As a member of the [Fair Work Week Coalition](#) led by CT Working Families, CWEALF supports legislation that provides predictable and stable work schedules to hourly workers, resting periods in between long shifts, predictability pay for canceled shifts, and access to additional hours when they become available.



CWEALF POLICY PRIORITY

PAID FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE

Paid family and medical leave provides wage replacement to workers who need to take leave from work to recover from a serious illness, care for a loved one with a serious illness, or welcome a new child. When workers do not have access to paid family and medical leave, they risk their job, their paycheck and their wellbeing - all just to be able to care for themselves or a family member.

Connecticut's paid family and medical leave program took effect earlier this year and operates similarly to insurance: workers pay a small percentage of their weekly paycheck into a fund administered by the [Connecticut Paid Leave Authority](#) that they can then draw from when they need time away from work for any of the qualifying reasons outlined in the law.

QUICK FACTS: WHY IS PAID FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE IMPORTANT?

- Across the country, [just 6%](#) of the lowest paid workers have access to paid leave compared to 43% of higher paid workers.
- Lack of access to paid leave [disproportionately impacts](#) women and people of color who are overrepresented in low-wage jobs that do not provide paid leave and are less likely to be able to financially absorb the impacts of a missed paycheck, due to decades of racism, sexism and discrimination.
- Paid leave is strongly associated with reduced infant and post-neonatal mortality rates: [researchers estimate](#) providing 12 weeks of job-protected paid leave in the U.S. would result in nearly 600 fewer infant and post-neonatal deaths per year.
- California's statewide paid leave program, which has been in effect since 2004 and is the longest standing paid leave program in the country, is associated with improved health outcomes for children in early elementary school. Research in California [also suggests](#) that paid leave may also help prevent child maltreatment, perhaps by reducing risk factors such as parental stress and depression.



CWEALF POLICY PRIORITY

PAID FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE

POLICY RECOMMENDATION:

CWEALF is proud to lead the [Campaign for Paid Family Leave](#), the coalition that fought for and won passage of one of the most generous paid family and medical leave laws in the nation in 2019. The law took effect in January 2022 and since then, thousands of workers have accessed paid leave benefits.

Now, we urge elected officials to:

- Oppose any efforts to weaken or rollback the law;
- Regularly examine ways to strengthen the program; and
- Commit to ongoing education and outreach efforts to constituents to ensure workers across the state have access to the paid leave they need and are paying for



PAID SICK DAYS VS. PAID FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE - WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?



In this guide, we've referred to paid sick days and paid family and medical leave. These are two different (but similar) policies that go hand-in-hand to advance women's economic security.



Paid sick days are paid for by employers (usually through payroll) and provide paid time off that is accrued and used for shorter term needs or illnesses. Paid family and medical leave works like an insurance program, where all workers pay a small amount into a fund that is administered by the Connecticut Paid Leave Authority that they can then use when they need to take longer time away from work to welcome a new child, recover from a serious illness or care for a loved one. [More information on the differences is available here.](#)



Connecticut Campaign for
PAID FAMILY LEAVE

CWEALF POLICY PRIORITY

ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE CHILD CARE

Women, especially women of color, continue to shoulder the majority of caregiving responsibilities in their families. Lack of access to safe, affordable, and reliable childcare is a significant barrier to women's ability to advance in the workforce and economic security. CWEALF urges candidates and lawmakers to adopt legislation to significantly improve Connecticut's child care system.

QUICK FACTS: WHY IS ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE CHILD CARE IMPORTANT?

- The struggle to obtain safe, reliable and affordable child care persisted well before the COVID-19 crisis. In addition to the [high cost of care](#), even prior to the pandemic Connecticut experienced a deficit of almost 50,000 infant/toddler child care slots.
- The child care industry has experienced some of the most severe impacts from COVID-19 and is still missing [over 1 in 12 jobs](#) (8.4%) since the start of the crisis. Ongoing staffing shortages continue to prevent an equitable recovery, as they also make it harder for parents - especially women - to secure the child care they need to work.
- Child care is essential to women's reentry into the workforce: [research shows](#) nearly 1 in 6 mothers (16%) and nearly 1 in 4 mothers with children under 5 (23%) report that they stop working (or looking for work) when their children are not in school or child care, compared to just 6% of fathers and 11% of fathers with children under 5.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION:

CWEALF is a member of the [Child Care for Connecticut's Future Coalition](#) and supports legislation to strengthen our state's child care system, including measures to:

- **Support child care workers and providers:**
 - Child care providers are the backbone of our workforce and wellbeing of the state's economy but are often overlooked as small businesses. Connecticut must ensure that all child care providers are paid a living wage, especially family child care providers (FCCs) who [earn wages significantly below minimum wage](#).
 - We also support legislation that encourages entrepreneurs to open child care centers, including industry-specific business training and financial support.
- **Innovate Connecticut's Child Care System:**
 - Connecticut should build on investments in child care adopted in last session's state budget and take steps to initiate universal child care. We urge candidates and lawmakers to investigate and advance innovative approaches to make the state's child care system more accessible and affordable so that all families can access the care that they need in the setting of their choice.

CWEALF POLICY PRIORITY

HUSKY FOR IMMIGRANTS

QUICK FACTS: WHY IS HUSKY FOR IMMIGRANTS IMPORTANT?

- Fifty-six percent ([56%](#)) of individuals who are undocumented in Connecticut are uninsured, compared to 6.3% of the state's population overall.
- Under current policy, someone must be treated at an emergency room if their life is in danger - regardless of their immigration status. Without insurance coverage, undocumented families end up with expensive medical bills and are often unable to afford necessary follow up care. Emergency room visits can often be avoided with preventive care that is inaccessible for many undocumented children and families without HUSKY coverage.
- Connecticut's neighboring states, New York and Massachusetts, offer health care services to all children regardless of immigration status. California's Medicaid program covers all immigrants, regardless of status, up to age 26.
- Expanding health care coverage benefits everyone, including hospitals: according to a 2019 report, uncompensated care costs hospitals in Connecticut [\\$806 million](#).

POLICY RECOMMENDATION:

CWEALF is an active member and supports the leadership of the [HUSKY 4 Immigrants Coalition](#), which will continue to build on past victories and keep fighting to expand access to HUSKY for all immigrants, regardless of status or age. Last session, the state budget extended Medicaid eligibility to children who are undocumented up to the age of 12 and once enrolled, those children will remain eligible for Medicaid coverage until age 19. This is a first step, but we support the Coalition's goal to expand access to all undocumented residents regardless of age.



CWEALF POLICY PRIORITIES: WHERE WE SUPPORT

- **Abortion Rights & Reproductive Health Care:** We are a member of the Coalition for Choice. While abortion remains legal in the state of Connecticut, we will continue to advocate for policies that protect patients and providers and increase access to abortion care. We also support the leadership of our partners, [Planned Parenthood of Southern New England](#) and [Pro-Choice CT](#).
- **Domestic and Sexual Violence:** Domestic and sexual violence impact women's economic security. CWEALF is proud to continue to partner with the [Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence \(CCADV\)](#) and the [Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence](#) to advocate for increased protections for victims and survivors.
- **Gender Wage & Wealth Gaps:** Lost wages due to the gender wage and wealth gaps have long-lasting impacts on women's housing, childcare, education, retirement and health care decisions, especially for women of color. We support legislation that addresses gendered pricing, as well as initiatives to continue our state's stance as a leader in pay equity and transparency. We also support policies that curb student debt and cancel student loans, as well as the leadership of the [Student Loan Fund](#).
- **Gun Control:** We support the leadership of the [CT Against Gun Violence](#) and policies that keep our communities safe from gun violence.
- **Health Equity and Health Care for All:** We support policies that ensure all Connecticut residents have access to quality and affordable health care, regardless of gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, immigration status, race, ethnicity, income, or disability. This includes legislation that creates a public option and increases access to comprehensive mental health care that is affordable and culturally appropriate. We support the leadership of [Health Equity Solutions](#) and other advocates.
- **Housing:** Housing is a human right and we support policies that provide more inclusive housing opportunities that are equitable, accessible, affordable and safe for all, especially for families in the communities where they want to live. For more information, see the [CT Fair Housing Center](#).
- **LGBTQIA+ Rights:** All people, regardless of sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, should be protected under the law and free from discrimination or harassment. CWEALF supports legislation to advance and protect the rights of the LGBTQ+ community, as well as the leadership of groups such as [Equality Connecticut](#).
- **Recovery for All:** We support the [Recovery For All](#) coalition's efforts to create greater transparency and build equity into our state's current tax structure.

CONNECT WITH CWEALF:

SCHEDULE A MEETING

CWEALF staff is available to meet with all candidates to discuss our policy priorities and is proud to serve as a resource to all candidates and elected officials on women's economic security.

To schedule a meeting, please contact **Madeline Granato**, Policy Director, mgranato@cwealf.org.

CONNECT ON SOCIAL MEDIA:

Like and Follow CWEALF's Twitter,, Instagram and Facebook:



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CONNECT ONLINE:

- Visit www.cwealf.org to learn more about our work & services
- Stay in the know by signing up to receive CWEALF's action alerts [here](#).

CONNECT TO CWEALF'S FREE, BILINGUAL LEGAL EDUCATION PROGRAM:

For current and potential elected officials - If you know a woman living with low income who needs assistance regarding family law, employment discrimination or other issues, call CWEALF's free Legal Education Information & Referral line: 860-524-0601 or email. ¡Se habla español!

PLEDGE TO SUPPORT WOMEN'S ECONOMIC SECURITY!

Are you a candidate who supports women's economic security? Take our pledge & share!

<https://bit.ly/CWEALFVoterPledge>

