

### **Judiciary Committee**

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

Submitted by: Madeline Granato, Policy Manager

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- S.B. 237: *An Act Establishing a Task Force to Evaluate Statutes of Limitations for Sexual Assault Crimes*
- S.B. 238: *An Act Concerning the Extension of the Statute of Limitations for the Prosecution of Sexual Assault*
- H.B. 5246: *An Act Eliminating the Statute of Limitations in the Case of Sexual Assault*

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 nearly forty-five years, CWEALF has provided legal education and legal advocacy services to individuals about family law and civil rights issues, many of whom seek guidance about divorce, child support, alimony and custody.

We urge the Committee to support H.B. 5246: *An Act Eliminating the Statute of Limitations in the Case of Sexual Assault* and oppose S.B. 237: *An Act Establishing a Task Force to Evaluate Statutes of Limitations for Sexual Assault Crimes* and S.B. 238: *An Act Concerning the Extension of the Statute of Limitations for the Prosecution of Sexual Assault*.

The emotional, mental and physical impact of sexual violence can last a lifetime. But, in CT our criminal justice system severely limits the chance for survivors of sexual violence to seek justice. Connecticut law provides survivors of sexual violence with a 5 year criminal statute of limitations, the window of time in which the state can bring criminal charges against the perpetrator. Connecticut's statute of limitations is the shortest in New England and the third shortest in the country.

As an organization dedicated to women and girls, who are disproportionately impacted by sexual violence, CWEALF supports the intent of S.B. 237, to establish a task force to examine the statute of limitations for sexual assault crimes, and S.B. 238, to increase the criminal statute of limitations for sexual assault crimes in Connecticut from 5 years to 10 years.

But, neither of these bills fully achieves the change needed in our state. Instead, CWEALF supports H.B. 5246 to eliminate the statute of limitations for sexual assault crimes. Without total elimination of the criminal statute of limitations, victims of sexual assault in our state continue to be left behind by the criminal justice system.

Victims of sexual assault often face blame, fear, intimidation and scrutiny that prevents them from coming forward until long after the crime. After an assault, a survivor may face multiple barriers that prevent them from immediately reporting and often must choose carefully if, when, and to whom they will disclose the assault. The elimination of the statute of limitations will remove at least one barrier: time.

Recent high-profile cases of sexual assault and thousands of #MeToo accounts illustrate the ability of perpetrators to escape criminal prosecution because of the expiration of the statute of limitations. We support the elimination of the statute of limitations for sexual assault crimes to give survivors the time they need to seek support and services after an assault, and make an informed decision to report their assault to law enforcement, seek legal counsel, or pursue a case in court.

Elimination of the statute of limitations does not change the burden of proof in a court case. Prosecutors would not pursue sexual assault cases without enough evidence to build a viable case.

The impact of sexual assault and violence on its victims extends far beyond the number of years established in our state's statute of limitations. The opportunity for victims to seek justice should not have an expiration date. We must fully eliminate the statute of limitations for sexual assault to provide the support and justice victims in our state deserve.