

Labor & Public Employees Committee

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

Governor's Bill No. 5043: *An Act Promoting a Fair, Civil and Harassment-Free Workplace*

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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 nearly forty-five years, CWEALF has advocated 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 educate Connecticut residents, especially low-income women, about their rights and connect them to legal resources and attorneys. We also provide sexual harassment prevention trainings to companies, nonprofit organizations, and educational institutions, to create a safe and respectful work culture.

While the recent nationwide allegations of sexual harassment revealed can be shocking, the pervasive nature of sexual harassment across every industry is not surprising. Both nationally and in our own Connecticut workplaces, sexual harassment remains a significant problem. According to a new report from [Stop Street Harassment](#), 81% of women and 43% of men reported experiencing some form of sexual harassment and/or assault. The report also found that 38% of women reported sexual harassment at their workplace.

Sexual harassment in the workplace threatens workers' economic survival. It frequently leads to job loss, lost wages, legal fees, detachment from the workforce, and less income for families. More than ¼ of sexual harassment charges originate in industries with large numbers of service-sector and low-wage workers, who are predominantly women.

Workplace harassment often affects individuals' physical and emotional wellbeing, too. According to the International Journal of Public Health, non-physical sexual harassment (such as comments or jokes) is associated with a psychological impact on the targets - including anxiety, depression, negative body image, and lowered self-esteem.¹ It can also result in physical effects, such as headaches, sleep disorders, weight loss or gain, and nausea.

¹ Bendixen, M., Daveronis, J. & Kennair, L.E.O. Int J Public Health (2018) 63: 3.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s00038-017-1049-3>

CWEALF supports Governor's Bill No. 5043 to modernize the training requirements in Connecticut.

Currently, Connecticut law requires employers with 50 or more employees to provide two hours of training to supervisory employees within six months of their hire, but this is only a one-time training. This current requirement leaves out many companies and many employees.

Governor's Bill No. 5043 would extend this critical training to employers with 15 or more employees, both supervisory and nonsupervisory. It would also require that all such employees receive supplementary training every five years. The bill codifies essential components of training plans that are frequently included in current trainings, and adds newer elements such as bystander intervention and workplace civility – critical pieces that are gaining growing recognition as effective techniques to prevent workplace harassment.

CWEALF urges the Committee to support Governor's Bill No. 5043 to further prevent sexual harassment in the workplace, and support women's economic security.