Human Services Committee
Public Testimony of the Connecticut Women’s Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF)
H.B. 5310: An Act Eliminating State Recovery of Public Assistance Except as Required Under Federal Law
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March 5, 2020

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-six years, CWEALF has been a leading advocate for policy solutions to enhance women’s economic security, combat discrimination, and increase gender equity in our state.

CWEALF also serves as an advocacy partner to Secure Jobs 2.0, multiyear program led by the Melville Charitable Trust and other philanthropic partners to increase the income of families transitioning out of homelessness by connecting them to the education, training, and supports they need to secure and maintain stable employment. In the program’s pilot, 87% of participating families were female headed households.

CWEALF urges the Committee to support H.B. 5310: An Act Eliminating State Recovery of Public Assistance Except as Required Under Federal Law.

Connecticut is currently one of just two states in the country that continues to require welfare recipients to pay the state back for the financial assistance they have received, which essentially treats welfare as a loan. The state places a lien on the recipient’s assets and demands repayment when the person sells or refinances a home, receives a legal settlement or any inheritance, or dies and attempts to leave any inheritance to heirs.

A national study from 1973 – fifty years ago – concluded that Congress should prohibit all recovery in the federally funded cash assistance programs, and that states should also repeal the requirement in General Assistance. Since the study, at least 30 states have followed that recommendation.

In Connecticut, 9.9% of women live in poverty, including 11.1% of Asian women, 13.9% of Black women, 22.8% of Latina women, and 17.8% of Native women. 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. According to United Way’s ALICE report,

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2 See note 1.
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

Connecticut does not treat other forms of assistance that support wealthier families or corporations as debts, including income tax credits and corporate welfare. To continue to collect “debt” from the state’s most vulnerable and poorest residents perpetuates the cycle of poverty.

CWEALF urges the Committee to advance H.B. 5310 to support families who receive cash assistance to reach economic sufficiency.

³ http://womenandgirls.ctdata.org/