Education Committee

H.B. 5220: An Act Expanding Eligibility in the Care 4 Kids Program to Parents Participating in an Even Start Program or Enrolled in Certain Secondary Education Programs

H.B. 5222: An Act Expanding Eligibility in the Care 4 Kids Program for Homeless Families

Public Testimony of the CT Women’s Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF)
Submitted by: Madeline Granato, Policy Director and Kristina Carvalho, MSW Intern
March 6, 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 Connecticut.

CWEALF also serves as an advocacy partner to Secure Jobs 2.0, a 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. Access to affordable and reliable child care remains a significant barrier to lift families out of poverty and achieve economic security.

CWEALF urges the Committee to support H.B. 5220: An Act Expanding Eligibility in the Care4Kids Program to Parents Participating in an Even Start Program or Enrolled in Certain Secondary Education Programs and H.B. 5222: An Act Expanding Eligibility in the Care4Kids Program for Homeless Families.

Connecticut is currently one of just two states that does not allow for parents to access our state’s child care subsidy, Care4Kids, to participate in job training or education when they do not receive TFA. This gap exacerbates existing workforce shortages for middle skill jobs in Connecticut and imposes a difficult decision on low-income families: enroll in education and training to advance their economic security or maintain the affordable child care they receive from Care4Kids.

House Bill No. 5220 will expand the Care4Kids program to parents who participate in an Even Start program, which provides both child care and education for parents who did not complete high school. Expanding eligibility to Even Start participants allows these programs to stretch existing funding to serve additional families.
House Bill No. 5220 also expands Care4Kids eligibility to parents who enroll in nursing, advanced manufacturing, or early care and education program. Expansion of Care4Kids to parents enrolled in these programs addresses Connecticut's growing need to address workforce shortages and fill the middle skills gap.

For example, 43% of nurses in Connecticut are over 55 years old, and 29% are over the age of 60. Connecticut's nursing shortage will reach a crisis in the years to come unless we increase the number of nursing graduates to replace those who retire. Access to early care and education programs multiplies across several families: each early educator trained and working in the field allows multiple parents to work and advance their families' economic security. And a certificate in advanced manufacturing is often the gateway out of poverty, as Connecticut continues to experience a surge in the number of vacant manufacturing jobs across the state.

These programs are essential to secure sufficient wages and stable employment. Research from *Reach Higher, America: Overcoming Crisis in the U.S. Workforce* states seventy percent (70%) of Connecticut jobs require some form of postsecondary education or specialized training as of 2020.¹ House Bill No. 5220 will increase access to good paying jobs to lift families out of poverty and also increases the supply of qualified potential employees that our businesses need in Connecticut.

Without the Care4Kids subsidy, child care is often too expensive for many families. Research indicates single parents in Connecticut pay 49.4% of their income ($15,600) for center-based infant childcare, which is more than the average annual tuition and fees at a public four-year college or university ($12,760).²

House Bill No. 5220 is a necessary step forward in expanding access to Care4Kids for our state’s most vulnerable families and mirrors legislation passed in 28 states that allow parents to receive child care assistance while they earn up to a bachelor’s degree.

CWEALF also urges the Committee to support H.B. 5222: *An Act Expanding Eligibility in the Care 4 Kids Program for Homeless Families*, which will expand Care4Kids to parents who are homeless while searching for a job. Access to safe and reliable child care allows parents who are homeless to search for or maintain work, participate in job training or take other actions essential to resolve their homelessness; however, high costs of care and the ability to identify a provider that accommodates a homeless family’s inflexible or irregular schedules present significant barriers to obtain and maintain care.

CWEALF urges the Committee to advance both H.B. 5220 and H.B. 5220, which will expand Care4Kids eligibility to families and children in our state who are most in need of support. Both bills present a necessary step forward in uplifting the economic security of women.

---

and families in our state who depend on access to affordable child care to advance in the workforce and achieve economic self-sufficiency.