The Connecticut Women’s Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF) is a statewide, nonprofit organization 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 leader in the development of policy solutions that enhance women’s economic security, combat discrimination at work and increase gender equity.

CWEALF urges the Committee to support S.B. 318: An Act Protecting Employee Freedom of Speech and Conscience. Senate Bill No. 318 protects workers’ constitutional rights of freedom of speech and conscience by establishing a state labor standard that allows employees to refuse to attend captive audience meetings or refuse to listen to speech communicating the employer’s opinion concerning religious or political matters.

Unions boost workers’ economic security. Workers who join together to bargain wages, hours and working conditions earn better wages, utilize fewer safety net services, and experience less turnover than non-union workers. Women, especially women of color, who are affiliated with a union or whose job is covered by a union contract earn higher wages and are more likely to access employer-provided health insurance than women who are not in unions.¹

When workers organize to form unions, however, Connecticut employers frequently utilize captive audience meetings and other hostile tactics. Captive audience meetings are mandatory, closed-door meetings during work hours, that often deter workers from choosing a union. Under current law, employers can discipline workers who speak up and even fire workers who refuse to attend.

Research shows that women’s earnings increase when they participate in unions. Nationally among women working full-time, those in unions have median weekly earnings of $942, compared with $723 for non-union workers, an increase of 30 percent.² Across all major racial and ethnic groups of women, median earnings are higher when comparing full-time workers in unions will full-time non-union workers. This earnings advantage is largest for Hispanic women. While Hispanic women earn the lowest of any racial/ethnic group, Hispanic women in unions earn $264 more weekly, a 47% increase, than those who are not.³

Women covered by a union contract (77%) are also more likely to have health insurance provided by their employer or union than those who are not covered by a union contract.
Health insurance coverage significantly reduces mortality and improves access to health care, treatment for chronic illness, and use of primary and preventive care.

Workers deserve a voice on the job and the ability to fairly negotiate wages, benefits and working conditions with their employer. Union participation is a critical contributor to the economic security and workforce advancement of women. We urge the Committee to support S.B. 318. Thank you.

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\(^{2}\) See note 1.

\(^{ii}\) See note 1.

\(^{iv}\) See note 1.