ABOUT CWEALF

The Connecticut Women’s Education and Legal Fund advocates for and empowers women and girls** in Connecticut, especially those who are underserved or marginalized. CWEALF works to create an equitable society where women and girls thrive through legal education, public policy & advocacy, and women’s advancement & leadership.

To learn more about CWEALF and our services, please visit our website at cwealf.org.

WHY SHOULD WE CENTER WOMEN IN POLICY?

Women, specifically women of color, have felt the most severe financial, social, and emotional impacts of the COVID-19 public health crisis. To unravel systemic racism and create a truly equitable state, we must center the needs of women, specifically women of color, in all critical policy decisions.

Prior to the pandemic, women in Connecticut faced significant barriers to economic prosperity including over-representation in low-wage jobs or supportive workplace policies like paid sick or family leave, a persistent gender wage gap, and discrimination at work.

Across the state, 47.8% of women under 65 do not have an income sufficient to cover household essentials. Women in Connecticut make up nearly half of the state’s workforce and continue to be a growing number of breadwinners to their families; however, 29% of female-headed households in Connecticut live in poverty. Connecticut’s economy cannot operate at its full potential unless we remove the barriers that impede women from achieving economic security.

CWEALF created this guide as a tool for candidates to learn more about issues critical to women’s economic security in our state, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. During a moment so monumental in our nation’s history, we must work together to address the racial and gender disparities exacerbated by the pandemic to make Connecticut a safer and more prosperous place to live for all women and their families.

CWEALF staff is available to discuss these issues more in depth. Please note: CWEALF does not endorse candidates. All sources used to create this document are cited at the end of the guide.

**includes women and girls who identify as cisgender, transgender, and nonbinary.

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PAY EQUITY

While women’s wages are critical to the state and country’s economic growth, the gender wage gap in Connecticut negatively impacts how quickly women pay off their student loans, provide for themselves and their families and spend on basic goods, as well as their overall quality of life. CWEALF urges candidates and elected officials to continue Connecticut’s stance as a leader in gender equity by advancing policies that combat the gender wage gap. For information on existing Connecticut laws regarding pay equity, please click here.

QUICK FACTS:

Women, especially women of color, continue to earn significantly less than men.

- Women in Connecticut typically make $0.84 for every dollar paid to men, an inequity significantly larger for women of color: Asian women working full time, year-round earn $0.83, Black women in Connecticut typically earn $0.57 cents, Latina women earn $0.48 cents, and Native women earn $0.55 for every dollar paid to white men.

- Intersectional identities are often overlooked when discussing the gender wage gap, especially within the LGBTQ+ community. Research shows that transgender women experience the most severe wage gap and that their wages decrease by nearly a third after they transition.

- Workers with disabilities also face a significant wage gap: full-time, year-round workers with a disability earn 87 cents for every dollar earned by those with no disability. According to the National Women’s Law Center, women with disabilities make 83% of what men with disabilities make, which oftentimes is ignored or goes unnoticed.

The wage gap begins early in women’s careers and adds up over time.

- Research shows that just one year after college graduation, women are paid 82 percent of what men are paid. When controlling for factors known to affect earnings such as education, training and hours worked, women still earn 7% less than men just one year out of college.

- Although women comprise 56% of college students, they hold nearly 2/3 of the total student loan debt nationwide. Black women graduate with the most student loan debt, averaging $30,400, compared to $22,000 for white women and $19,500 for white men.
The gender wage gap exacerbates the economic impact of COVID-19, especially for women in frontline jobs.

- About 80% of healthcare workers nationally are women. According to the National Women’s Law Center, women make up 85% of home health and personal care aides and 59% are women of color. Due to the wage gap, they lose $5,000 a year.

- Sixty-six percent (66%) of grocery store workers are women, and 43% of them are women of color. Women in this occupation lose $3,000 a year to the gender wage gap.

- The sectors most affected by the economic downturn are those that have high female employment including hospitality, restaurants and the travel industry.

PAY EQUITY: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Salary Range Transparency

- Studies show that women often ask for less when they negotiate their salaries compared to men, even when they are otherwise equally qualified. Research also indicates that women who do negotiate their salaries are already at a disadvantage because they are perceived as greedy, demanding and less desirable candidates. This leads to lower starting pay.

- In the hiring process, it is common for applicants to negotiate an amount that is 10-20% more than their existing salary. Since women and people of color already earn significantly less than white, non-Hispanic men, they would need to request a salary that is a particularly large percentage increase over their current pay for their request to be on-par with their white, non-Hispanic, male colleagues. When employers hold all of the salary information, they are at a significant advantage in negotiating the lowest possible salary. This causes women and people of color to lose out most.

- CWEALF recommends legislation that requires employers to provide job applicants and current employees salary ranges to level the playing field regardless of gender or race and prevent inherent biases held by some employers.

Equal Pay for Comparable Work

- The General Assembly must also continue to combat the wage gap by requiring employers to pay their employees equal wages for comparable work, or work that requires substantially similar skill, effort, and responsibility that is performed under similar working conditions.

- The existing “equal pay for equal work” standard was drafted to cover women working in manufacturing jobs who performed tasks identical to the
person next to them on the factory floor. While the standard was effective at eliminating gendered pay scales for factory workers that existed at the time the language was written, since then, courts haven’t adapted the law for realities of the *modern workplace.*

- “Equal pay for comparable work” addresses inequity in pay that results from a long history of sex-segregated occupations and different pay scales for jobs considered traditionally male vs. those considered traditionally female. Nine states, including MA, have adopted this language. For more information, view [CWEALF’s fact sheet on 2020’s H.B. 5383](#).

**RIGHTS AND PROTECTIONS AT WORK**

Women are disproportionately affected by racially discriminatory employment and workplace policies and that often hinder their ability to advance in the workforce and provide for their families. CWEALF supports actions to protect and advance the rights and opportunities of women in the workforce.

**QUICK FACTS:**

**Women are overrepresented in the low-wage workforce and lack access to critical supports like paid sick leave and the ability to move up the career ladder.**

- According to the National Women’s Law Center, nearly 67% of Connecticut’s low-wage workforce are women, the majority of whom are women of color. During the COVID-19 crisis, this makes women more vulnerable to job loss and less likely to have access to paid sick leave or paid family and medical leave to care for themselves or their families.

- Just **30% of the lowest paid workers** in the U.S. have access to paid sick days. While Connecticut became the first state in the nation to require certain employers to provide paid sick leave in 2011, carve outs in the law continue to leave many workers across the state without access to the benefit, which is even more important during a pandemic.

- More than 350,000 low-wage, hourly shift workers in the state, mostly women and people of color, struggle to earn a stable income because of **unpredictable and erratic work schedules.** When an employer assigns, changes or cancels their shifts last minute, working mothers struggle to maintain stable child care, pursue education to advance their careers, receive medical care - or simply work enough hours at their job to pay for basic household needs.

- In Connecticut, 47.8% of women under 65 do not have an income sufficient to cover household essentials. These women workers are more likely **to not have the ability to work remotely** for their jobs, further preventing them from having a stable income for their families during the pandemic.
The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbates multiple hurdles women face at work and at home.

- According to research from LeanIn during the pandemic women with children who work full-time are typically spending 20 more hours per week on housework and caregiving than men in the same situation, causing increased stress and burnout.

- Along with the additional housework and childcare, women, especially women of color, report they are significantly more worried about paying for basic necessities including rent or mortgage payments or groceries than white men.

**RIGHTS AND PROTECTIONS AT WORK: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Paid Sick Leave:**

- CWEALF recommends Connecticut lawmakers revisit the state’s current paid sick leave law to ensure that no worker - especially during a global pandemic - is forced to go to work sick, or risk their paycheck when they need to care for a sick loved one.

- While Connecticut was the first state in the nation to require employers to provide paid sick leave, the current law applies solely to service workers who work for an employer of 50 or more, which leaves employees working at smaller businesses or within the gig economy without an option for paid sick leave. CWEALF supports changes to the law to include all employees regardless of employer size, occupation, or classification, and allow workers to take paid sick leave to care for their chosen family.

**Paid Family and Medical Leave:**

- CWEALF is proud to lead the Campaign for Paid Family Leave, a coalition that advocates for the passage and implementation of comprehensive paid family and medical leave for all Connecticut workers. Candidates and lawmakers must ensure timely and transparent implementation of Connecticut’s landmark paid family and medical leave law passed in 2019. CWEALF also urges candidates and lawmakers to educate their constituents on their rights under the new law and oppose any efforts to weaken the program.

**Fair Work Week:**

- Unstable and unpredictable work schedules add an additional burden on women, especially if they are the sole breadwinners in their homes. CWEALF is a member of the Fair Work Week Coalition led by CT Working Families and supports legislation that will increase protections for hourly workers including more predictable and stable work hours, resting periods in between long shifts, predictability pay for cancelled shifts, and access to additional hours when they become available.
The CROWN Act and additional measures to protect workers from racial and gender discrimination:

• CWEALF stands with the YWCA Hartford Region in calling on Connecticut to join the current states that have passed The CROWN Act to dismantle white supremacy culture, racism and discrimination in the workplace. The CROWN Act will ensure that workers, specifically Black women, are not discriminated against because of their hairstyle. Click here for more information and to support the CROWN Act.

• CWEALF also supports actions to combat gender discrimination at work, specifically during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as legislation to ensure all workers, regardless of the size of employer, are covered by the state's anti-discrimination statute.

ACCESS TO SAFE AND AFFORDABLE CHILDCARE

Women, especially women of color, continue to shoulder the majority of caregiving responsibilities in their families. Lack of access to safe, affordable, and reliable childcare is a significant barrier to women’s ability to advance in the workforce and economic security. CWEALF urges candidates and lawmakers to adopt legislation to significantly improve Connecticut’s child care system.

QUICK FACTS:

• While the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted significant challenges within Connecticut’s child care system, the struggle to obtain safe, reliable and affordable child care persisted well before the public emergency. In addition to the high cost of care, even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic Connecticut experienced a deficit of almost 50,000 infant/toddler child care slots.

• The child care industry has experienced some of the most severe impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic. Without adequate federal support, research from the Center for American Progress indicates that Connecticut will lose 48% of its childcare supply.

• Potential closures add more challenges to an existing child care crisis, where child care providers operate on thin margins and struggle to stay in business if they are not consistently collecting tuition and/or subsidy payments.

Source: Center for American Progress, 2020.
ACCESS TO SAFE & AFFORDABLE CHILDCARE: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Expand Care4Kids:

CWEALF urges lawmakers to expand Connecticut’s Care4Kids program to parents enrolled in a postsecondary education or job training program. By restricting access to Care4Kids when parents are in school, families must overcome another hurdle to support themselves financially and move up the career ladder.

CWEALF also recommends legislation to expand access to Care 4 Kids to families who are experiencing homelessness.

Support for child care workers and providers:

Child care providers are the backbone of our workforce and wellbeing of the state’s economy but are often overlooked as small businesses. Connecticut must ensure that all child care providers are paid a living wage, especially family child care providers (FCCs) who earn wages significantly below minimum wage.

CWEALF also supports legislation that encourages entrepreneurs to open child care centers, including industry-specific business training and financial support.

As Connecticut continues to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, lawmakers must also ensure that all child care providers have access to essential supplies, including personal protective equipment (PPE), cleaning supplies, and food.

Innovate Connecticut’s Child Care System:

Connecticut should take steps to initiate universal child care. The COVID-19 pandemic highlights both the importance of Connecticut’s child care system and the inequities that exist within it. During and after the COVID-19 crisis, CWEALF urges candidates and lawmakers to investigate and advance innovative approaches to make the state’s child care system more accessible and affordable for all families.
Critical policy decisions, especially those to address systemic racism, must be informed by the experiences, voices, and input of people of color. The disproportionate health and economic impacts of COVID-19 on Connecticut’s Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) and low-income communities, as well as people who are disabled and medically-compromised, make the need for public participation in the lawmaking process even more urgent.

Last-minute meeting agendas, opaque and inconsistent testimony signups, lack of remote participation options, and absence of a variety of hours, times, and places for participation act to ensure that only the most privileged voices will be heard by legislators.

Earlier this year, CWEALF joined over 100 advocacy organizations across the state to send a letter to Governor Lamont and legislative leadership demanding a transparent and accessible legislative process that allows for meaningful public engagement. Click here to read the full letter & recommendations.

**ADDITIONAL PRIORITIES CRITICAL TO WOMEN’S ECONOMIC SECURITY**

Pay equity, rights and protections at work, access to safe and affordable childcare and improving access to the legislature, are not the only policy changes necessary for women’s economic security. See below for important information and resources about other issues critical to women in our state:

**Domestic and Sexual Violence:** Domestic and sexual violence impact women’s economic security. CWEALF is proud to continue to partner with the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence and the Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence to advocate for increased protections for victims and survivors. Learn more from the CCADV and the Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence.

**Housing:** CWEALF supports actions to cancel rent during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as legislation to increase access to affordable housing and combat restrictive zoning laws that continue to segregate Connecticut. Learn more via Desegregate CT and Connecticut Fair Housing Center.

**Immigrant Rights:** Undocumented immigrants continue to be left behind in critical policy decisions, especially in response to COVID-19. The Connecticut General Assembly needs to expand access to HUSKY insurance to include all undocumented immigrants and provide...
a COVID-19 relief fund specifically for undocumented immigrants and their families. Learn more from CT Students for a Dream.

LGBTQIA+ Rights: All people, regardless of sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, should be protected under the law and free from discrimination or harassment. CWEALF supports legislation to advance and protect the rights of our state’s LGBTQIA+ community. Learn more from CT Equality.

Police Accountability: Police brutality against the Black community is a feminist issue; we cannot achieve gender equity without dismantling white supremacy, and we will not achieve gender justice without racial justice. CWEALF supports our community partners leading on this issue, including ACLU of Connecticut.

Reproductive Rights & Healthcare: CWEALF is a proud member of the Coalition for Choice, a group led by Planned Parenthood of Southern New England (PPSNE) that advocates for access to comprehensive healthcare and reproductive choice. Connect with Planned Parenthood Votes! Connecticut and NARAL Pro-Choice Connecticut.

Schedule a Meeting
CWEALF staff is available to meet with all candidates to discuss our policy priorities and is proud to serve as a resource to all candidates and elected officials on women’s economic security. To schedule a meeting, please contact Madeline Granato, Policy Director, mgranato@cwealf.org.

Connect Online:
Visit www.cwealf.org to learn more about our work & services

Stay in the know by signing up to receive CWEALF’s action alerts here.

Connect on Social Media:
Be sure to “Like” and Follow CWEALF and the Campaign for Paid Family Leave on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter (see below).

If you or someone you know need assistance, call CWEALF’s free Legal Education Information & Referral line: 860-524-0601 or email. ¡Se habla español!

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Why Should We Center Women in Policy?


Pay Equity

- National Women’s Law Center, Connecticut data.
- Young, M., “Equal pay for women must address the disability pay gap too”, July 2019. Your Dream Blog
- Hill, C., “Graduating to a pay gap: The earnings of women and men one year after college graduation”, n.d., AAUW.

Rights and Protections at Work

- National Women’s Law Center, Fair work schedules.

Access to Safe and Affordable Childcare

- Smith, H., “Three bills to make child care more affordable, accessible”, May 2019. CT Mirror.