

### **Labor & Public Employees Committee**

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

H.B. 5044: An Act Concerning Fair Treatment of Sick Workers

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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.

CWEALF urges you to support H.B. No. 5044: *An Act Concerning Fair Treatment of Sick Workers*.

We strongly support this legislation to expand Connecticut's paid sick leave coverage requirements to more employees and family members and create unpaid sick leave requirements for CT employees of smaller employers. While the 2012 law was groundbreaking in the country, it excludes far too many employers and workers.

At some point, people need time away from work to recover from an illness or care for a sick family member. Workers and students who show up sick for work or school are a health hazard to other co-workers, customers, clients, and students. Paid sick leave coverage would permit employees time to care for themselves and their families when ill and provide the possibility for both to access preventive care, without negatively affecting the employee's income. While unpaid sick leave coverage for smaller employers would help workers and their families to recover, *paid* time for sick days supports workers' financial stability.

Expanded paid sick leave coverage in CT is especially important for women with families, as they tend to provide a larger share of family care and are earning an increasingly large share of their family's income. In 2015, 42% of mothers were sole or primary breadwinners, bringing in at least half of family earnings.<sup>1</sup>

Research also shows that women continue to provide between 60-75% of all caregiving, and they may spend as much as 50% more time providing care than males.<sup>2</sup> Without caregivers, the economic costs to health care and government services would increase

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<sup>1</sup> Center for American Progress, *Breadwinning Mothers are Increasingly the U.S. Norm* (December 19, 2016)

<sup>2</sup> Institute on Aging, 2016.

dramatically. The AARP reports that informal caregivers had an estimated economic value of *\$470 billion* in 2013.<sup>3</sup>

Access to paid sick leave benefits low-income workers, workers of color and women significantly, as they are more likely to reduce their work hours or leave their jobs when caregivers. Lower-wage workers are less likely to be able to afford a day without pay and the loss of their jobs is devastating to them and their families.<sup>4</sup> Paid sick days also would protect paychecks and jobs of workers who are survivors of domestic violence or sexual assault or those who care for victim family members, the majority of whom are women.

Since the 2012 law in CT, the fear from employers of the paid sick leave requirement did not materialize on a widespread basis. A 2016 study of the effects of the first three years of CT sick leave requirements demonstrated that Connecticut's requirements have a minimal impact on costs, and only a few employers made adjustments such as increasing prices or reducing employee hours because of it. Many employers believed the requirements improved employee productivity and morale.<sup>5</sup>

CWEALF urges your support of H.B. 5044 to expand the coverage of Connecticut's existing paid sick leave requirements and create unpaid sick leave requirements. Such coverage will continue to improve the health and financial well-being of Connecticut workers and their families.

The expanded law would also provide needed support to the multitudes of Connecticut workers who provide largely unpaid caregiving to their family members or who care for new children. In addition to our support H.B. 5044, we also urge the Committee to vote favorably on paid family and medical leave, to support workers who need to take prolonged absences from work for serious illnesses.

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<sup>3</sup> AARP Public Policy Institute, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Joint Economic Committee, "Expanding Access to Paid Sick Leave: The Impact of the Healthy Families Act on America's Workers" (March 2010)

<sup>5</sup> Appelbaum, *Good for Business? Connecticut's Paid Sick Leave Law*, Center for Economic and Policy Research Publication (January 2014)