

Labor and Public Employees Committee

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

H.B. 6478: *An Act Concerning Workers' Compensation*

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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 and marginalized. For forty-seven years, CWEALF has been a leading advocate in the development of policy solutions that advance women's economic security, combat discrimination, and increase gender equity in Connecticut.

CWEALF urges the Committee to support H.B. 6478: *An Act Concerning Workers' Compensation*.

Connecticut's workers' compensation law requires workers to demonstrate they acquired an illness at work in order to qualify for benefits. For a virus that spreads as easily as COVID-19, it is nearly impossible for a worker to prove where and how they contracted it; however, because public gatherings and non-essential activities have been strictly limited during the public health emergency, it is likely that essential workers who contract COVID-19 became infected on the job.

House Bill No. 6478 creates a workers' compensation presumption for COVID-19 and allows essential workers to qualify for benefits when they miss work due to a COVID-19 diagnosis or symptoms that are later diagnosed as the virus. Without this presumption, workers are forced to exhaust their own accumulated sick time, pay for treatment, and risk their paycheck while they are forced to navigate a lengthy appeals process with the Workers' Compensation Commission.

House Bill No. 6478 moves the burden of proof in workers' compensation claims and will require an employer to prove that an employee did not contract the virus at work. Employers can continue to challenge claims, but the law would assume a worker contracted the virus on the job unless the employer can demonstrate otherwise.

Governor Lamont's Executive Order 7JJJ provides the presumption provided in H.B. 6478 but only for workers who contracted COVID-19 between March 10 and May 20, 2020. This is a very limited time frame and does not recognize the course the virus has taken over the last year, including several spikes in transmission since May that continues to make workplaces dangerous.

House Bill No. 6478 is especially critical to women, especially women of color who are overrepresented in jobs on the frontlines of the COVID-19 crisis and have continued to go to work without adequate protection from contracting the virus. For example, women in Connecticut comprise 49% of the state's workforce but make up 78% of the healthcare workforce, 67% of the education workforce, and 56% of accommodation and food service industries.¹ Women also account for 54% of COVID-19 cases in our state.

CWEALF urges the Committee and lawmakers this year to pass H.B. 6478 to provide critical relief to essential workers in our state who have kept our economy running. Thank you.

¹ [Essential Equity: Women, COVID-19 and Rebuilding CT](#)