

Human Services Committee

Public Testimony of the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF)
S.B. 837: AN ACT CONCERNING MEDICAID PAYMENT RATES FOR NURSE-MIDWIVES

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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 or marginalized. For forty-five years, CWEALF has led the development of policy solutions that enhance women's economic security and increase access to reproductive healthcare. CWEALF is an active member of the Coalition for Choice, a group that promotes policies that improve women's access to reproductive healthcare and protects a woman's right to bodily autonomy.

CWEALF urges the Committee to support S.B. 837: *An Act Concerning Medicaid Payment Rates for Nurse-Midwives*.

Certified Nurse Midwives should receive equal reimbursement rates as OB/GYNs for the same services at the same rate as OB/GYNs to improve women's reproductive health and access to comprehensive health care, especially in communities of color.

Certified Nurse Midwives/Certified Midwives (CNMs/CMs) are licensed, autonomous health care providers with prescriptive authority in Connecticut. Midwives play a critical role in reproductive health care and provide care beyond maternity services including contraceptive coverage, annual women's exams, STI testing, breastfeeding support, cancer services, and additional preventative services. Research indicates that women who receive care from Certified Nurse Midwives have lower rates of cesarean birth, inductions, anesthesia use and higher rates of breastfeeding.

In 2011, certified nurse-midwives gained equitable reimbursement under Medicare as part of the Affordable Care Act; however, Connecticut midwives' fees billed to Medicaid are currently reimbursed at just 90% of the physician rate. Connecticut is currently surrounded by states where Certified Nurse Midwives are reimbursed equitably to physicians for Medicaid and Medicare.

While the Affordable Care Act significantly increased health care coverage across the country and here in Connecticut, many people still lack access to comprehensive, culturally appropriate health care. Lack of access to affordable health care disproportionately impacts women of color, who also face a significant gender wage gap and disparities in health outcomes, and access to health care and services. Black women are 40% more likely to die from breast cancer than white women and also experience a higher rate of maternal

mortality, as they are 3 to 4 times more likely to die during childbirth than non-Hispanic white women. Latina women also often face health disparities and have the highest incidence rate of cervical cancer in the United States.

Equitable reimbursement of nurse midwives will naturally expand the use of and practice by CNMs/CMs in Connecticut (there are currently only 208 licensed CMs/CNMs in the state) and will improve health outcomes here in Connecticut. We urge the Committee to support S.B. 837.