

## **Judiciary Committee**

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

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In support of:

- S.B. 992: *An Act Concerning the Trust Act*
- S.B. 948: *An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the Connecticut Sentencing Commission with Respect to Misdemeanor Sentences*

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 forty-five years, CWEALF has provided legal education and legal advocacy services to individuals about family law and civil rights issues, including immigration. CWEALF also serves as a leader in the development of policy solutions that enhance women's economic security in our state, including pay equity, sexual harassment, and paid family and medical leave.

We urge the committee to support S.B. 992: *An Act Concerning the Trust Act* and S.B. 948: *An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the Connecticut Sentencing Commission with Respect to Misdemeanor Sentences*.

The majority of CWEALF's Legal Education clients are low-income women with at least one dependent. Over the past few years, CWEALF has observed a significant increase in the number of people who seek our services to know their rights and options regarding immigration.

CWEALF's Legal Education Program provides information about the law, and connections to low-cost attorney referrals and social services agencies, one-on-one individualized advocacy, and community education. As part of these free services, CWEALF provides guidance to parents or guardians to complete family preparedness plans, a document that enables undocumented parents in Connecticut to set a clear legal plan for the care of their children should they face deportation.

One of CWEALF's recent clients, Gabriela, left her native country for the United States in pursuit of a better life for her and her children. Here in Connecticut, Gabriela found a steady job to support her family as a single mother for many years; however, the hostile political environment over the past two years left Gabriela fearful for herself and her

family. Desperate, terrified, and knowing no other options, Gabriela considered fleeing the state with her children, the youngest of whom was just three years old.

Although Gabriela sought CWEALF's services and was able to establish a family preparedness plan, fear of deportation often prevents our clients from exercising other civil rights, such as filing for custody or divorce, or contacting law enforcement when they experience violence or abuse.

All women, regardless of immigration status, deserve fair and equal treatment under the law and in the workforce. Women and their children comprise approximately three-quarters of people who migrate to the United States each year. Roughly 60% of undocumented women currently participate in the labor force, often in occupations that are critical to the function of our economy, such as child care, elder care or other service industries.

As the current Administration continues to promote strict and often harmful anti-immigration policies, targeted attacks on the immigrant community persist and hundreds of women and their families live in constant fear of deportation and of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) presence in local communities.

Senate Bill No. 992 will update Connecticut's TRUST Act to require a federal judicial warrant whenever ICE seeks to detain a member of the community. By prohibiting state and local law enforcement from serving federal ICE detainers without a valid judicial warrant, local law enforcement are able to focus on local community priorities, rather than the federal government's deportation agenda.

CWEALF also supports S.B. 948 to reduce the maximum length of misdemeanor convictions in Connecticut to 364 days. Connecticut's current one-year maximum sentence for class A misdemeanors creates drastic, consequences for noncitizens and turns state misdemeanor crimes into "aggravated felonies" under federal law. That means a Green Card holder convicted of a single low-level, nonviolent misdemeanor offense can be subject to mandatory detention and deportation. Senate Bill No. 948 proposes a technical fix that will sever a segment of the prison-to-deportation pipeline that currently funnels community members from the state criminal justice system directly into deportation proceedings.

It's time for Connecticut to take a clear stance against unjust laws at the federal level that tear people away from their families and communities. CWEALF urges the Committee to support S.B. 992 and S.B. 948.