

## **Committee on Labor and Public Employees**

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

S.B. 668: *An Act Concerning a Fair Work Week Schedule*

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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 forty-seven years, CWEALF has been a leading advocate for policies that advance the economic security of women across our state and promote gender equity in the workplace.

We urge the committee to support S.B. 668: *An Act Concerning a Fair Work Week Schedule*. Even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, low-wage workers across Connecticut struggled to earn stable income because of unpredictable work schedules. Employees are often forced to go to work with little notice, maintain open availability for "on-call" shifts without any guarantee of work and have shifts canceled at the last minute. When workers cannot predict their hours or pay from day to day, they are often unable to secure child care or a second job or qualify for promotions that lead to better health and financial benefits.

The issues and consequences of unpredictable scheduling practices are heightened by the COVID-19 crisis. In Connecticut, women - specifically women of color - are overrepresented in low-wage jobs on the frontlines of the pandemic. Almost half of all jobs created since the start of economic recovery since the pandemic have been in low-wage industries, such as retail and fast food service, which do not pay a livable wage and lack benefits, predictability and flexibility.

Through the pandemic, women continue to shoulder the majority of caregiving responsibilities to their families and balance remote school or closures of child or eldercare centers with work. Over 250,000 of Connecticut's hourly workers are parents of children under 18 years old. Unfair scheduling practices especially impact women of color, who are overrepresented in the low-wage workforce and among single mothers who work to support their families.

Unpredictable schedules lead to real life consequences for workers and their families. Last session, CWEALF's MSW Intern, Chenae Russell, recently shared her personal story:

*“Nine years ago, I worked part-time at a retail store while I was also homeless. During this time, I felt anxious with a tight pain in my chest and stressed living with the uncertainty of whether I would have enough money for the week to pay bills and survive. Unpredictable schedules and canceled shifts left me feeling hopeless and unable to plan ahead using public transportation, seek other jobs, take college classes or meet financial goals to get out of debt. I felt like a commodity at the hands of an employer who did not care about me as a person not only struggling to survive but trying hard to reach economic stability. In 2015, now a mother and sole provider to my 1-year-old daughter Cecelia, my unpredictable schedule only made my life harder because my daughter also counted on these lost wages from those cancelled shifts just as much I did to survive. I was often forced to make last minute childcare arrangements with my mom, who was thankfully there for me, but the uncertainty and inability to plan ahead put stress on the both of us to make accommodations and have stability.”*

With income and work schedules that fluctuate, workers often have no choice but to cobble together childcare at the last minute. Research from National Women's Law Center indicates since child care centers require caregivers to pay a weekly or monthly fee, regardless of how often the child attends, holding a spot in a child care center is expensive and infeasible for workers unsure of when they will work that particular week. The pandemic has exacerbated the struggle of working parents to find safe, reliable and affordable child care as a large number of child care centers have closed.

Unstable and unpredictable work schedules also increase the difficulty for families to budget and pay their bills. According to the Retail Work and Family Life Survey, nearly half of the retail workers surveyed reported that their household incomes vary from week to week, while one-third reported that it is difficult for them to pay their bills in a typical month. Workers with variable schedules experience greater income volatility, which leads to higher stress and poor physical and mental health.

Unpredictable scheduling also limits women's access to comprehensive and necessary health care. Routine, preventive care, including well-woman visits or pediatric appointments, is often scheduled long before low-wage workers receive their schedules. On-call shift scheduling often prevents women from being able to make appointments or forces them to cancel entirely, which may delay follow-up treatments or diagnoses.

To recover from the pandemic and grow Connecticut's economy, we must create working conditions that make success and economic sufficiency possible for our state's low-wage

workforce, which is predominantly women and people of color. If Connecticut truly values working families, especially female headed households who, like Chenaë, struggle to make ends meet and provide for their families, lawmakers must pass S.B. 668. We urge the Committee and Connecticut lawmakers to advance this important legislation this year.