

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

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

H.B. 5356: *An Act Concerning Pandemic Pay for Essential Workers*

Submitted by: Nicole Sanclemente, Policy and Program Coordinator

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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-eight 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.

Through CWEALF's Legal Education Program, we provide information, education, referrals, and bilingual advocacy to the Connecticut community to ensure that all individuals in our state have access to legal justice. The majority of CWEALF's clients are low-income women with at least one dependent.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the work that we do as an organization, specifically within our Legal Education Program and our direct service initiatives. Our clients have had to bear the overwhelming burden of the pandemic, many of whom were essential workers and had to risk their lives for the good of the public, all while receiving unlivable and unsustainable wages. Many of our clients are also the main breadwinners of their families, and were forced to choose between taking care of themselves or their loved ones and earning a paycheck. Although these were issues that many folks were dealing with prior to the public health crisis, they have exacerbated considerably since March 2020. As the pandemic recedes and we are now moving our efforts towards recovery, we must center the lives of the folks who risked themselves day in and day out to ensure that our communities were safe and our economy continued to run.

Since the start of the pandemic, Connecticut's 13 billionaires have seized \$13.7 billion in additional wealth, but the thousands of essential workers across various sectors - especially workers of color and women workers - who risked their lives to keep society afloat, haven't yet received any pandemic pay. Essential workers played a vital role throughout the public health crisis; some were working on the frontlines as the virus started to make its way through the state, while others were making sure that education continued for our children, or that grocery store aisles were stocked with everything that was needed for families frantically preparing for lockdowns. Around the nation our essential workers were called "heroes", and now is the time to repay them for the sacrifices they have made to be given tha.



*The state's leading champion  
for women and girls*

CWEALF urges the committee to support H.B. 5356: *An Act Concerning Pandemic Pay for Essential Workers*, to take a step towards repayment, respect, and homage for the essential workers in Connecticut who supported us during these risky and frightening times - and their families who had to endure it.