

## **Public Health Committee**

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

H.B. 5261: *An Act Increasing Access to Reproductive Health Care*

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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.

We urge the committee to support H.B. 5261: *An Act Increasing Access to Reproductive Health Care*.

House Bill No. 5261 modernizes Connecticut's existing law and removes medically unnecessary barriers that prevent qualified Advanced Practice Clinicians (APCs) from providing abortion in our state. Connecticut's current law and regulations for abortion are outdated and do not reflect current medical standards of practice. With passage of H.B. 5261, we have the opportunity to join the 14 other states - including our neighbors in New York and Massachusetts - who permit APCs to perform procedural abortion.

Permitting APCs to provide aspiration abortion will allow Connecticut patients to obtain care in their own communities from the same health provider they know and trust, and that they see for their routine wellness exams, sexually-transmitted infection (STI) testing, or vaccinations. The ability of APCs to provide aspiration abortion will result in greater access to care for communities that already face significant systemic, economic and logistical barriers to health care.

While nearly 1 in 4 women have abortions in their lifetime, the number of facilities that provide abortions in the U.S. is steadily declining and preventing patients from receiving the care that they need, including here in Connecticut.

The Supreme Court is also considering a case which could overturn or undermine *Roe v. Wade*, which established our constitutional right to abortion, sometime before the end of June of this year. If that happens, access to abortion care will become even more challenging. States like Connecticut can play a critical role in expanding access to abortion with the passage of legislation such as H.B. 5261.

Reproductive freedom is at the core of women's economic security and ability to provide for themselves and their families. Research indicates that women who are denied access to

abortion face economic hardship in the years following.<sup>1</sup> The inability to decide if and when to have children also undermines women's ability to finish high school or college. Women continue to shoulder the majority of caregiving responsibilities without the support they need to help meet the demands of school, work and family, such as access to affordable and high quality child care, predictable schedules, paid leave and a living wage. Since educational attainment and earnings are linked, the decision of whether or not to have children affects lifetime economic stability and security. That decision can also impact a woman's choices regarding whether she is able to pursue, remain or advance in a job or career.

House Bill No. 5261 is also critical to Connecticut's continued response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the crisis began, women - specifically women of color - have been hit hardest by job losses. Women, especially Black women and Latinas, are overrepresented in jobs on the frontlines of the pandemic and have risked their lives to ensure the essential functions of our economy continue to operate.

At the same time, women are struggling to stay in the workforce as our elder and child care systems have collapsed. The COVID-19 economic and public health crisis may lead to an increased demand for abortion as more people decide to avoid pregnancy or have fewer children. For example, during the 2008–09 recession, nearly half of women in a national survey reported that they wanted to avoid or delay childbearing because of the economy, and about two-thirds said they could not afford to have a baby.<sup>2</sup>

Research shows close to sixty percent of women seeking abortion care already have a child and that seventy five percent are poor or low income.<sup>3</sup> Women who are already struggling to stay financially afloat and support their families are the most impacted by restrictions in accessing abortion.

We will not achieve gender equity without full reproductive freedom and the ability to decide if, when and how to have children. House Bill No. 5261 will expand access to abortion care in Connecticut, addresses a critical public health need and is an important step to eliminate barriers to essential, time-sensitive health care. We urge the Committee and Connecticut lawmakers to advance this legislation this session.

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<sup>1</sup> Women's Media Center. 2018. "Lack of abortion access creates economic hardships for women."

<https://www.womensmediacenter.com/news-features/lack-of-abortion-access-creates-economic-hardships-for-women>

<sup>2</sup> National Women's Law Center. 2021. Access to Abortion During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Recession.

<https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/3.21-Brief-1-3-1.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> National Women's Law Center. 2019. Abortion Bans are an Attack on Women's Economic Security.

<https://nwlc.org/abortion-bans-are-an-attack-on-womens-economic-security/>