

Education Committee

S.B. 111 : *An Act Concerning Funding for Child Care Programs*

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

Submitted by: Madeline Granato, Policy Director

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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.

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.

CWEALF urges the Committee to support S.B. 111: *An Act Concerning Funding for Child Care Programs*.

The COVID-19 crisis has threatened the collapse of an already fragile system of child care in our state. Since March 2020, child care providers have struggled to remain open with changing public health guidelines and declining enrollment. During the pandemic, 3 in 4 private childcare providers closed their doors. In an industry where 92% of businesses are owned by women, the impact of the pandemic on the child care sector not only negatively affects parents of young children in need of care, but also child care workers and business owners in need of work and reliable income to support their own families.¹

Access to affordable and quality child care is essential to support Connecticut's workforce; however, even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, a 2018 report indicated that 44% of Connecticut's population lived in a "child care desert," defined as an area with "little or no access to quality child care."²

The Office of Early Child (OEC) also estimated prior to COVID-19 that Connecticut was short 51,000 licensed child care spaces for infants and toddlers. Child care deserts are more likely to exist in geographic areas with higher percentages of rural, low-income, Black/African

¹ Essential Equity: Women, COVID-19 and Rebuilding CT. 2021. Retrieved from:

<https://womenandgirls.ctdata.org/docs/Essential%20Equity%20Women%20Covid-19%20and%20Rebuilding%20CT.pdf>

² See note 1

American and Hispanic/Latinx families.³ Research shows the pandemic could result in the loss of almost half (48%) of Connecticut's child care supply, or 46,349 slots.⁴

Lack of access to child care is compounded by issues with affordability. Research in Connecticut depicts that only 1 in 20 families of color can afford high quality child care compared to 1 in 5 families in the overall population.⁵ When families do not have access to the affordable and reliable childcare that they need, women are more likely to bear the burden of caregiving responsibilities: during the pandemic, 76% female parents reported needing to stay home and not work due to their child care situation compared to 24% of male parents.⁶

Historically, child care is a feminized and undervalued profession which has led to lower pay for women, specifically women of color, that perpetuates the gender wage gap and threatens women's economic security. As we continue to respond to and recover from the COVID-19 crisis, additional support and value of the contributions of women is critical to strengthen the child care sector, as well as the state's economy overall.

The child care sector is in crisis and while some centers have already closed entirely, many more are on the brink of closure within the next few months because they are unable to find staff. Connecticut's entire system of child care needs equitable support across all settings without raising tuition on parents who already struggle to afford the costs of early care and education. Small private centers, non profit centers (including religious programs) and family child care providers need on-going and substantial wage supplements. State funded and school readiness programs, which have not had a meaningful increase since 2015, also need generous adjustments to their reimbursement rates to ensure they are able to continue to provide high quality care and education.

Connecticut's child care providers and workers, as well as the children and families that depend on their care, are in urgent need of meaningful relief. CWEALF supports S.B. 111 and urges lawmakers to act boldly this legislative session to invest in and strengthen Connecticut's child care system.

³ See note 1

⁴ See note 1

⁵ Ibid

⁶ CTDATA . (2022).