

Judiciary Committee

S.B. 5: An Act Concerning Online Dating Operators, Online Child Grooming and Harassment, Domestic Violence Training and Protections for Victims of Family Violence and Domestic Violence
Public Testimony of the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF)

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The Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF) is a statewide, nonprofit organization 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 of policy solutions that enhance women's economic security, access to justice, and freedom from violence and harassment.

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. CWEALF's Legal Education program provides information and resources to individuals seeking support related to family law and civil rights issues, including divorce, alimony, and custody. The majority of CWEALF's clients are low-income women with at least one dependent and many have or are currently experiencing family violence.

CWEALF strongly supports *S.B. 5: An Act Concerning Online Dating Operators, Online Child Grooming and Harassment, Domestic Violence Training and Protections for Victims of Family Violence and Domestic Violence*, specifically its initiatives to strengthen protections for victims of domestic violence in the workplace.

The emotional and physical impact of domestic violence on a victim can often impact their ability to focus and be productive at work. A 2018 national survey of survivors indicated 83% of respondents reported that their abusive partners disrupted their ability to work. Of those individuals, 53% said they lost their job because of the abuse, 49% said they missed one or more days of work, 18% said they missed out on a promotion or a raise and 38% said they lost out on other work opportunities.

In order to address abuse and keep themselves and their children safe, victims may need time away from work to attend court appearances, obtain legal or medical assistance, or find a new place to live; however, lack of supportive workplaces may result in victims losing their job. This may make them even more financially dependent on their abuser and more likely to remain in the relationship, which perpetuates a cycle of abuse and an already pervasive problem of domestic violence.

CWEALF supports Sections 8-9 of *S.B. 5*, which requires all state employees to view a one-hour virtual training regarding domestic violence and requires all employers with three or more employees to post information about domestic violence and the resources available to victims. For a survivor, work may be the only safe place and a prime opportunity to seek help from

supervisors or co-workers. Employers can and should play an important role in protecting their employees by creating a workplace culture of support and resilience and it is critical for both employers and employees to be knowledgeable about domestic violence and what resources are available if an employee ever discloses abuse.

Senate Bill No. 5 also strengthens antidiscrimination protections for victims of domestic violence. Under current Connecticut law, often the only way to pursue a complaint regarding discrimination an individual faces due to their status as a victim of family violence is by pursuing their case as gender or race discrimination, since family violence victims are disproportionately women of color. Sections 10 and 13-23 of S.B. 5 allows protection in employment, housing public accommodations and credit transactions and solidifies Connecticut's existing safe leave law (CGS 31-51ss) by allowing victims of family violence to attend court proceedings, medical or counseling appointments, etc. without fear of adverse impact on their employment.

Domestic violence has far-reaching implications for its victims that can impact their employment, housing, credit status and more. Senate Bill No. 5 is a critical step to address the discrimination that often follows victims throughout their lives. We urge the Committee and lawmakers to advance S.B. 5 this session.