

Government Administration and Elections (GAE) Committee

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

S.J. No. 30: *Resolution Proposing a State Constitutional Amendment to Recognize a Right of Personal Reproductive Autonomy and Freedom*

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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.

For almost 50 years, the right to abortion has been protected by the Constitution; however, today that right hangs on by a thread as state politicians continue to pass increasingly radical and extreme laws designed to make abortion essentially inaccessible. The U.S. Supreme Court also appears ready to overrule almost five decades of legal precedent and overturn *Roe v. Wade*, a decision in clear opposition to the 80% of Americans who want to protect the right to safe and legal abortion.

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.¹ 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.

¹ 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>

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.² Women who are already struggling to stay financially afloat and support their families are the most impacted by restrictions in accessing abortion.

We are grateful that more than 30 years ago, Connecticut was a leader in the fight for reproductive freedom and took bold action to protect the right to abortion in our state statutes; however, even in Connecticut and other states where we know abortion will remain legal, the right to abortion alone does not guarantee access to abortion care.

Today, for millions of people across the country and for people right here in Connecticut, the right to abortion is a right in name only due to decades of systemic oppression and discrimination that keeps them from accessing the care that they need. To remain a leader in reproductive freedom and protect a person's right to bodily autonomy, Connecticut must continue to take bold action to dismantle barriers to abortion access and ensure that every resident can access abortion care when they need it, in their community, and with providers they know and trust.

We are also grateful to champions in the state legislature for introducing two critical bills this session, H.B. 5261 and H.B. 5414, that will expand access to abortion in our state and protect patients and providers in Connecticut from other states' extreme abortion bans. We urge lawmakers to advance both of these bills out of Committee and to act now for patients across our state who need and deserve access to abortion care.

We will not achieve gender equity without full reproductive freedom and the ability to decide if, when and how to have children. Our work is not over until every resident can exercise their right to safe, legal abortion that is free from obstacles, shame and stigma, and political interference. We must protect the right to abortion and continue the fight to ensure every person who needs an abortion can get one.

² National Women's Law Center. 2019. Abortion Bans are an Attack on Women's Economic Security. <https://nwl.org/abortion-bans-are-an-attack-on-womens-economic-security/>