

Housing Committee

Public Testimony of the CT Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF)
S.B. 291: *An Act Concerning Certain Protections For Group And Family Child Care Homes*
Submitted by: Madeline Granato, Policy Director
March 4, 2021

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-seven years, CWEALF has been a leader in the development of policy solutions that enhance women's economic security, combat discrimination and increase gender equity.

CWEALF urges the committee to support S.B. 291: *An Act Concerning Certain Protections For Group And Family Child Care Homes*.

Access to affordable, quality child care is essential to support Connecticut's workforce; however, 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." 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 American and Hispanic/Latino families.

The COVID-19 crisis has threatened the collapse of an already fragile system of child care in Connecticut. Research shows the pandemic could result in the loss of almost half (48%) of Connecticut's child care supply, or 46,349 slots.¹ Lack of access to child care is compounded by issues with affordability: research shows that in Connecticut, 8 in 10 families cannot afford the full cost of high quality infant and toddler care, including 94% of families of color.²

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 overall. Protecting and advancing family and group child care is one key strategy to increase Connecticut's supply of licensed child care, especially for families living in child care deserts, and support entrepreneurs that operate small child care businesses.

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

Since the beginning of the pandemic the demand for child care in small group settings has increased as families seek to minimize the risks of exposure to the virus, while the supply of child care has decreased. Family child care is a critical component to Connecticut's child care shortage: families often prefer family child care because it offers culturally-competent care, costs less than center-based care and is available to those without stable means of transportation.

While licensed child care ensures that programs meet basic health and safety standards, family child care providers encounter significant zoning and housing barriers in seeking to become licensed. Existing restrictions by zoning and landlords often force child care providers to operate unregulated child care businesses or to close entirely. Several states, including New York and California, have adopted protections against zoning restrictions and restrictive leases for home-based child care.

Senate Bill No. 291 will strengthen housing and zoning protections for family child care providers by requiring municipalities to submit an annual report that certifies their municipality's zoning ordinance is in compliance or the timeframe that they will come into compliance.

Senate Bill No. 291 is a critical step to remove barriers to access family and group child care in Connecticut and is necessary to ensure that affordable and high-quality child care is accessible to all who need it in our state. CWEALF urges the Committee to pass this critical legislation this year.