The new legislative session begins on January 4, 2023. I hope you’ll be by our side, advocating and organizing for the women and girls of Connecticut. Decades of systemic racism, sexism, and economic injustice have burdened the lives of Connecticut women and prevented our state’s economy from operating at its fullest potential.

As we move forward from the COVID-19 pandemic, now more than ever, we must work with urgency to center and trust the lived experiences, needs, and wisdom of Black women, women of color, and women living with poverty in all policy decisions. We are committed to advocating for policy change that is explicitly anti-racist and antisexist, with a justice and reparations lens.

Together, we can create the world that all women and girls deserve.
VOTER GUIDE 2022
YOU GOT LOUD & YOU WERE HEARD

Thanks to your activism, hundreds of people across the state used our Let’s Get Loud! Voter Guide to the 2022 Connecticut Election in English and Spanish to organize in their community, asked their candidates questions about the issues they care about, and made sure their family and friends had the information they needed to get out and vote!

We’re grateful to the Hartford Public Library and especially to Graciela Rivera, Branch Manager for the Hartford Public Library at the Lyric (Park Street), for taking the lead on women’s economic security by collaborating with CWEALF on the Hartford Public Library’s yearly voter guide registration event. Thanks to Graciela’s leadership, Park Street and the surrounding community had access to information on voter registration, voting, civic engagement, organizing, advocacy, economic security, policy, and women’s change history as they walked past their library every day.

This is what women’s leadership looks like in practice. Beautiful collaborations that feed our community! Check out our Community Organizing Director Jeniffer Perez Caraballo’s interview with Graciela Rivera here.
Meg: When did you begin volunteering with CWEALF and why do you continue to volunteer answering the I&R phone line?

Pam: I practiced law for 18 years before moving to Connecticut where I started volunteering at CWEALF in 2018 answering calls on the Information and Referral (I&R) service phone line. I know how devastating unresolved civil legal problems can be for women, their families, and their economic security.

Meg: What’s something you’d like to share about your time answering calls?

Pam: What really makes me angry is when women feel their agency and power has been taken from them and they don’t know what to do about it. Most women who call CWEALF don’t have access to the court system and don’t know how the court system works. Most of our callers can’t afford to hire an attorney and don’t know who to contact to answer questions about their basic legal rights on family law, employment, and housing. The more calls I answered, the more I realized just how critical the I&R service is for women.

Meg: You’re still volunteering on I&R, but now you’ll also be in a leadership role on the Board. Why did you want to serve on CWEALF’s Board?

Pam: I was really interested in serving on the Board because of the political situation across the country with women effectively becoming second-class citizens as a result of the overturning of Roe v. Wade. CWEALF can make an impact and show that women’s power cannot be taken away no matter who is in charge. Women need to show that we are not going to be pushed around, and I felt that being on the Board of CWEALF, which is a statewide organization that advocates for women, was the best way to help get that message across.

I try to convey that in two other ways, when I answer I&R calls, I don’t say it outright to somebody, “I’m going to help you reclaim your power.” That’s just too corny sounding! But when I’m giving someone information, answering their questions, and encouraging them to do what they want to do, I am subtly saying, “You have the power to do this! Here’s some tools. Come back and ask us for more tools if you need them.” I’m hoping they realize they can take steps to do what they want on their own terms with tools we provide them. So that’s one way I see of helping women to reclaim their power.

The second way is I’m a clinic escort at Planned Parenthood one day a week. It infuriates me when I’m at Planned Parenthood, and I see how women are shouted at with an intent to intimidate or humiliate them because of their personal health care choices.

I’m a clinic escort because I want women to know that they are not alone. That you can ignore the shouting people outside because they don’t know you. Nobody knows you except yourself and only you can decide what’s right for you. We’re here just simply to show you that we care about you and we’re going to help in whatever way you want to be helped to access whatever you need in the healthcare setting.
Volunteer Spotlight

(continued from page 3)

The fact that it is not a constitutionally protected right to control our bodies - that is going to trickle down to every aspect of a woman's life if she's not able to control her body, economic security is going to fall. It goes hand in hand. Yes, we're fortunate to live in a state like Connecticut, where abortion care is protected.

What people don't realize is that it is not a given; it's not set in cement. Absolutely not. Because these forces are out there trying to remove that right, someday it may happen here.

We need to be as vigilant as we possibly can, and we need to make it clear that women are holding onto our power that we're entitled to, and we're not letting anybody take this away from us.

Meg: I believe you will! We're so thrilled for the experience and passion you bring to the Board. Thank you, Pam.

Bridging The Justice Gap

CWEALF's highly trained staff and volunteers provide callers with legal information and access to a network of low-cost attorneys and community agencies so women can navigate through their legal issues and advocate for themselves.

CWEALF’s I&R phone line provides individuals with guidance and resources on:

- Workplace discrimination and sexual harassment
- Custody issues and parental disputes
- Protection from domestic violence
- Rights on CT’s paid family and medical leave law
- Divorce, child support, and more

CWEALF is proud to share our 2022 Legal Education Program report because it shows the tremendous dedication of our volunteers, staff, and donors to bridge the justice gap in our state! We can’t reach all areas of the state through outreach and organizing without the support of our donors. Thank you for making this work possible!
2022 Legal Education Program

#NationalInformationAndReferralDay

- 60% were family law related calls. Housing and employment issues were other top call reasons.
- 1,026 clients served from July 2021 to June 2022 with legal & social concerns.
- 83% were connected to an attorney or social service agency.
- 26% spoke a language other than English.

2022 Legal education program report
71% Earned below $25K a year
63% Had at least one dependent
91% Identified as a woman
64% Identified as a woman of color

Volunteers donated 1200 hours of time on the I&R line.

1 staff member 10 volunteers
The Peer Advocacy Project, CWEALF’s free 11-month advocacy training program, equips previous Legal Education clients and folks from the Greater Hartford area with the support and tools they need to lead and champion change in their own communities.

Policy and Program Coordinator Nicole Sanclemente leads our Peer Advocates in this journey of knowledge, professional development, and empowerment. Peer Advocates gained knowledge and skills on topics including family law, supporting survivors of domestic violence, public speaking, and community organizing. Peer Advocates concurrently created Community Advocacy Plans tailored to their passions and the needs of their communities. The program also trained Peer Advocates to serve Legal Education clients.

We take pride in the work our Peer Advocates do to provide resources, access, and education to their communities. CWEALF conducted our second Peer Advocacy cohort with two incredible Peer Advocates, B Diaz and Zulmary Velez.

"CWEALF is dedicated to making sure community members and leaders are heard. Through CWEALF, I had the opportunity to work on queer and consent-inclusive sex-ed. The Peer Advocacy program gave me the support I needed to launch my community work." – B Diaz

B Diaz (they/them/theirs), a 2021 UConn graduate and South Windsor resident, is passionate about LGBTQ2+ rights for students in their town’s school district. For their project, they were interested in creating a Queer-inclusive sex education for students in middle and high schools that they would propose to the Board of Education in South Windsor, with the long-term goal of implementing the curriculum on a statewide level. B began creating a policy memo based on the implementation of similar projects in other states to share with leaders in the South Windsor community.

B’s next goal is to start meeting with teachers, students, parents, faculty, and staff to gauge their support and engage their thoughts and opinions in the process. We’re excited to see B’s vision come to life as they continue to work on achieving their goal beyond the Peer Advocacy Project!
Get to know our Cohort

Zulmary Velez (she/her/hers), is a Hartford resident and mother of two. Zulmary is active in her community, volunteering her time at Connecticut’s Foodshare at her local church. Her passion to help fight food insecurity continued in her Community Advocacy Plan.

Zulmary created a flyer for her local food pantry to share with folks throughout her community, families at her children’s schools, and clients in CWEALF’s network.

Her effective outreach resulted in the food pantry reporting a substantial increase in families visiting the location, as well as folks donating food, hygiene and personal items, toys, clothes, and funds.

CWEALF is proud of the phenomenal work Zulmary achieved in the Peer Advocacy program and we can’t wait to see what comes next in her journey!

The Vice President Visits Connecticut

“No one should be made to fight alone, especially when you are fighting for fundamental rights,” Vice President Kamala Harris on the importance of coalition building to fight for reproductive justice alongside voting rights and LGBTQIA+ rights.

In October, CWEALF joined many of our community partners to welcome Vice President Kamala Harris to Connecticut at Central Connecticut State University. As a member of the CT Coalition for Choice, we’re immensely grateful for our community partners from Pro-Choice Connecticut, Planned Parenthood of Southern New England, and the ACLU of CT for their ongoing advocacy and leadership.
SUPPORT WOMEN, WORKERS AND FAMILIES

When we center women, our communities win. The majority of the individuals who use CWEALF’s free Legal Education services are women of color who have at least one child and live with low income. The lived experiences and wisdom of women, especially women of color, are essential to our advocacy and organizing for policy change to ensure women’s economic security in our state.

WHO WE ARE
CWEALF is a statewide, nonprofit that uses a justice and equity lens to advocate for under-resourced, marginalized women and girls in Connecticut. We work to close the civil legal justice gap and to create policy that advances women’s economic security.

Close the Gender Wage and Wealth Gap:
Lost wages due to the gender wage gap have long-lasting impacts on women’s housing, childcare, education, retirement and health care decisions, especially for women of color. We support legislation to continue to increase pay transparency and prohibit gendered pricing.

Gender and racial wage gaps exacerbate student loan debt and make it more difficult for women, especially women of color, to repay their loans. As a result, women carry nearly 2/3 of student loan debt in the U.S. We support the leadership of The Student Loan Fund to support borrowers and end student loan debt.

Create a Recovery for All:
We support the Recovery For All coalition’s efforts to create greater transparency and build equity into our state’s current tax structure. We must ensure that state and federal dollars are dedicated to erasing inequities by increased investments in pre-K through 12 public education, affordable housing, public higher education and job training programs, and access to affordable healthcare. We also urge legislative leaders to create a permanent child tax credit and fully fund Connecticut’s landmark Baby Bonds program.

ENSURE BASIC NEEDS ARE MET FOR ALL

Strengthen Access to Health Care and Reproductive Freedom:
We support policies that advance health equity and justice and ensure all Connecticut residents have access to quality and affordable health care regardless of gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, immigration status, race, ethnicity, income, or disability. This includes measures that remove barriers to accessing abortion and reproductive health care.
Save the Date

We’re bringing back our annual in-person event to celebrate CWEALF’s 50th Anniversary!

Saturday
April, 29, 2023
Additional details TBD

Staff
Janée Woods Weber, Executive Director
Meghan Dubois, Development and Communications Director
Madeline Granato, Policy Director
Jeniffer Perez Caraballo, Community Organizing Director
Denise Rhone, Director of Racial Equity and Legal Education
Nilda Rivera, Community Advocacy Manager
Nicole Sanclemente, Policy and Program Coordinator

Board of Directors
Ashika Brinkley, President
Marinda Monfilston, Vice President
Leslie Lyte, Secretary
Calvin Price, Treasurer
Ana Clara Blesso
Pamela Ellman
Brandi Kennedy

Volunteers & Interns
Nina Lin
Lisa Besman
Angie Botero
Claire Chan
Elizabeth Davidson-Wright
Pamela Ellman
Wendy Faivre McDonald
Ariana Gonzalez
Juana Harismendy
Abigail Nick
Abigayl Palmer
Rayann Suite
Audrey Zhong
CWEALF’s role within the community would not be possible without the dedication and efforts of attorneys in our Cooperating Attorney Network (CWEALF C.A.N.). Learn more about joining the network here or contact Denise Rhone, Director of Racial Equity and Legal Education, at drhone@cwealf.org.