

Dear Members of the Aging Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Carol J. Williams (Ph.D.) and I am from Willimantic. I am testifying in support of **S.B. 56 An Act Deterring Age Discrimination in Employment Applications, specifically, the part of the bill that prevents employers asking for date of birth, age, school attendance and graduation dates. I am testifying on behalf of the Women and Girls Funds Task Force on Public Policy which I chair for the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut.** We advocate for policies that will improve life for women and girls in CT but especially in Eastern Connecticut, the poorest and least well-educated part of the State. Therefore, we are especially concerned about the impact of age discrimination on women in Eastern Connecticut. S.B.56 is an important step in closing loopholes that allow employers to screen out eligible potential employees simply because of their age.

Age discrimination in hiring is more prevalent than you might think. A 2018 survey by AARP of people age 45 and older found that 61% of respondents have either seen or experienced age discrimination and 44% of respondents who applied or interviewed for a job in the last two years reported being asked age-related questions such as birth date and graduation dates. Also, recent evidence shows that hundreds of employers have found easy ways to shut out middle-age and older job seekers from their recruitment efforts on LinkedIn and Facebook.

Age discrimination, not unlike racism, is often unconscious. Recently, the Wall Street Journal reported results of a study which shockingly ranked Connecticut as #2 in implicit age discrimination!

Results of a landmark study conducted in 2015 reveal clearly the differential discrimination that older people face when job hunting. In that study, 40,000 resumes were sent out on behalf of fictitious males and females of various age categories for 13,000 actual jobs in 12 U.S. cities. These jobs were relatively low skill jobs such as janitor, administrative assistant and retail sales. In general, the older the candidate appeared on paper, the fewer callbacks they received! Candidates who appeared to be age 29-31 received 35% more call backs than those age 49-51 despite having similar qualifications and skills on paper.

Discrimination in hiring is even more prevalent for women. In the study mentioned above, resumes of older women had the fewest call backs no matter the kind of job. Even for sales jobs, the researchers concluded that there was "considerably stronger evidence of discrimination against older women than older men." Older women also tend to receive more rejections in the hiring process than men. Forbes magazine reported research showing that women face greater age discrimination in hiring than men do and also women are driven out of the workplace earlier than their male counterparts and when that happens, they will find it even more difficult to find a new job at an equivalent salary. The Equal Employment Opportunity Council (EEOC) has reported an uptick in age discrimination filings from older women and minorities since 2010.

At the same time, many people report that they will need to work longer than in the past. Real wage growth has stagnated for the last several decades. Pensions have all but disappeared. Having survived the "Great Recession" after 2008, many baby boomers and Generation Xers are planning to work past age 65. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, workers older than 65 make up the fastest growing segment of the labor force with workers age 35 to 54 growing much more slowly. By 2022, 35% of the total U.S. workforce will be age 50 or older. And the fastest growing two age cohorts in the labor pool are those over age 75 and those age 65-74.

As the U.S. population ages, researchers at the National Institute on Retirement Security report that women are 80% more likely to be impoverished at age 65+ while women ages 75-79 are three times more likely than men to be in poverty. In Eastern CT the situation for older women is even worse according to a study by Data Haven commissioned by the Community Foundation of Eastern CT. The population of women over 65 in Eastern Connecticut is projected to grow significantly over the next decade, faster than the state average; many occupations in Eastern CT remain gender segregated; one in five women in Norwich and Willimantic still don't have a high school diploma which dramatically reduces their employment opportunities. And, in seven eastern Connecticut towns, more than 40 percent of households live in poverty where a large percentage are single mothers, women of color and elderly women. These women desperately need to find and retain jobs in order to pay their bills. Many of the older women I have met in the service industry are forced to work more than one job to make ends meet.

To make matters worse, the New York Times reports that more than half of workers over 50 lose their long time employment before they are ready to retire and then they face great difficulty in getting rehired. On average, a 54-year-old job hunter can expect to be unemployed for nearly a year and when they do find a job, 9 out of 10 people have to accept a job that does not pay as much as their previous job. And this situation is toughest for women who suffer more age discrimination, starting in their 40's, than do men. In fact, older women now make up half of the long term unemployed according to a recent analysis by the Urban Institute.

S.B.56 will cost the State of Connecticut virtually nothing but it will begin to address some of the often subtle ageism that can prevent capable employees from being considered for jobs because they are screened out in the initial recruitment phase and never interviewed. Ironically, with the aging of our workforce in Connecticut and the loss of young people to other states, we need these older workers more than ever. It is in the State's best interest to institute measures such as S.B.56 to insure that older workers have an equal chance to compete for jobs. It is only fair that individuals be able to compete for jobs based on their skills and experience rather than on perceived strengths of being young. Please support S.B.56—some day you yourself may benefit! Thank you.

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