

## **Appropriations Committee**

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

H.B. 6439: *An Act Concerning the State Budget for the*

*Biennium Ending June Thirtieth, 2023, and Making Appropriations Therefor*

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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 and marginalized. For forty-seven years, CWEALF has been a leading advocate in the development of policy solutions that advance women's economic security, combat discrimination, and increase gender equity in Connecticut.

CWEALF submits this testimony in regards to the Governor's Proposed FY 2022-2023 Budget for Human Services within H.B. 6439: *An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June Thirtieth, 2021, and Making Appropriations Therefor.*

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated severe systemic inequities that existed in our state long before the crisis began, especially access to transparent, affordable and efficient healthcare. The current public health crisis speaks to the importance of access to reliable healthcare coverage for all Connecticut residents.

While communities of color are more likely to experience pre-existing health conditions that make them more susceptible and vulnerable to contracting COVID-19, they are less likely to have access to health insurance coverage.

Women, especially women of color, often less lack access to quality, affordable healthcare. In Connecticut specifically, 6.1% of women aged 19-24 are uninsured.<sup>1</sup> Women who are marginalized, including black women, women of color, women with disabilities, women who are transgender, and women with low incomes already face significant barriers to care, including the cost of care and discrimination in the health care system. The pandemic has substantially worsened these barriers.

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<sup>1</sup> [National Women's Law Center. Connecticut data.](#)

The pandemic has made it even more clear that access to health care starts with having health insurance. Without insurance or with deductibles and other costs too high to manage, people are less likely to get tested for COVID-19 or any other illnesses.

As we continue to prioritize prevention of outbreaks throughout the state, especially with new COVID-19 variants on the rise, we must ensure the availability of healthcare and the affordable insurance opportunities to relieve families of the financial burdens they deal with when receiving that care. Although health insurance is not sufficient to ensure access to care, it is a very necessary and vital part of access and a step in the right direction.

We strongly urge the Committee to amend this budget to:

- Increase HUSKY A and D eligibility limits to 201% FPL so that lower income adults can access quality, affordable health care;
- Create access to HUSKY programs for all income-eligible immigrants;
- Remove the asset test added to the Medicaid Savings Program, and;
- Restore cost of living increases for Connecticut's lowest income residents

CWEALF also recommends the Committee restore funding to the Connecticut Diaper Bank, a critical resource that serves tens of thousands of infants and toddlers in need. Diapers are vital to the physical and emotional well-being of new parents and their children. The COVID-19 crisis has heightened financial insecurity, specifically for women and families of color, and funding for The Diaper Bank is more essential than ever. No family should struggle to afford what should be considered a basic human need.

These suggested amendments are a critical step to ensure Connecticut residents are provided the necessary resources throughout the remainder of the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.