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Judiciary Committee

House Bill 5723: *An Act Concerning Discrimination*

Submitted by Sally Tamarkin, Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund
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I am submitting this testimony on behalf of CWEALF, a statewide, non-profit organization dedicated to empowering women, girls, and their families in order to achieve equal opportunities in their personal and professional lives. For over 34 years, CWEALF has worked to ensure that all people, regardless of their gender or sexual orientation, receive equal rights and treatment. Today I am here to urge you to support HB 5723, *An Act Concerning Discrimination*.

Currently, in the state of Connecticut, discrimination on the basis of gender identity or expression in employment, education, housing, lending or public accommodations is not prohibited by law. HB 5723 would do for transgender and gender non-conforming individuals what our state's non-discrimination law does for a great many vulnerable populations—ensure that their rights are protected by a state law.

If enacted, HB 5723 would simply add the phrase “gender identity or expression” to our state's non-discrimination law, thereby making protections set forth by a 2000 CHRO ruling explicit and uniform. As we know, it is not sufficient to protect the rights of a vulnerable population with only an agency ruling. To ensure that our fellow citizens are protected from discrimination, we enact laws that make those protections explicit and uniform.

At CWEALF we receive calls from individuals who have been fired or contracts not renewed when their status as a transgender individual is discovered. If you know anything about filing a complaint with the CHRO, you will understand that the energy and time that is necessary to complete this process can be overwhelming. Often the people who come to us just want their jobs back. They have already experienced much humiliation and do not want to, nor often can, expend the time to see through a discrimination complaint because it will continue to highlight their ‘otherness.’ Not only would this bill, if enacted, guarantee a means of seeking legal remedy against discrimination. Additionally, if Connecticut had laws which explicitly protected gender non-conforming individuals, the process for educating businesses and communities would be easier and bring about greater change. A law prohibiting discrimination on the basis of gender identity or expression would educate employers, lenders, landlords and all others subject to obey the law on what practices are acceptable and which are not. Currently, because there is no state law with explicit protections, what constitutes discrimination based on gender identity or expression may be unclear or only partially understood.

If this bill is becomes law, Connecticut will be following the lead of 13 other states, Washington, DC, and a variety of both private and public employers and

institutions throughout our state and country who have laws that offer protection from discrimination based on gender identity or expression. In passing these laws, these entities understand that communities, workforces, campuses, and a variety of other institutions are at their strongest, healthiest and most efficient when *all* their members' livelihoods are protected from discrimination.

Finally, state laws send important signals about the state's values, it is important today for you to pass this legislation so that our transgender brother, sisters, friends can live with basic human dignity. I urge you once again to pass HB 5723.

Thank you for your time.