Human Services Committee
Proposed Senate Bill 795: An Act Concerning a Two-Generational School Readiness and Workforce Development Plan
Submitted by Alice Pritchard, Executive Director, CT Women's Education and Legal Fund
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My name is Alice Pritchard and I am Executive Director of the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF). CWEALF is a statewide non-profit organization dedicated to empowering women, girls and their families to achieve equal opportunities in their personal and professional lives. For decades we have advocated for strategies to increase access for women to post-secondary education opportunities and careers that pay a living wage. Today, I am here on behalf of the Campaign for a Working Connecticut.

The Campaign's mission is to promote the state's economic competitiveness through the development of sustainable, effective workforce solutions to increase workers' skills and advance families to self-sufficiency. The Campaign is a unique and diverse state-wide coalition, which includes members consisting of education and training providers, workforce investment boards, advocates, unions and chambers of commerce.

Similar to the reasons I submitted testimony for Proposed H.B. 5823, I am submitting this testimony today to urge your support for *Proposed Senate Bill 795: An Act Concerning a Two-Generational School Readiness and Workforce Development Plan.*

Since 1999, CWEALF has worked with individuals and service providers involved in the Jobs First Employment Services program. What we have consistently witnessed is that people receiving cash assistance want to work. They are seeking educational opportunities that will prepare them for jobs so that they may become self-sufficient. As Connecticut has implemented new programs and designed different strategies to move the welfare population into self-sufficiency, by necessity, the system has to be flexible in its approach. This bill can expand the range of opportunities for participants to increase their skills and employability while addressing the needs of their families holistically. Individuals are unlikely to gain self-sufficiency without the right combination of education, training, and work/personal supports for themselves and their families.

Having a high school diploma is no longer a guarantee for a good job. According to "Meeting the Challenge: The Dynamics of Poverty in CT," women and men in Connecticut who lack a high school diploma can expect to be "very poor," 72% and 67% of the time, respectively. Vocational training and post-secondary education are becoming more important for securing self-sufficient employment in these economic times. In fact, 66 percent of jobs created by 2018 will require at least some post-secondary education[i]. Without basic skills such as reading, math and English

proficiency, jobs with high wages, health benefits and room for advancement are out of reach for Connecticut's poor population.[ii]

According to the December 2014, "At a Squint" produced by the CT Department of Labor, only 11% of the participants in the JFES system have education beyond the high school level. And "no high school diploma" is cited as a barrier to employment for 22% of the current caseload. Additionally, this report shows that only 13% of participants are involved in basic education and/or vocational training.

In addition to limited educational experience, families face other significant barriers to employment such as childcare. According to United Way's ALICE Report, the average cost of attending a full-time, accredited childcare center in Connecticut is $1,893 per month ($1,038 per month for an infant and $855 per month for a four year old). Childcare for two children is by far the greatest expense and accounts for 28 percent of United Way's Household Survival Budget.[iii] While alternative programs such as family daycare centers and state subsidized pre-school programs offer less expensive and more accessible childcare, they also hold the highest occupancy rates within the state.[iv]

The Campaign for a Working Connecticut supports this bill because it recognizes that parents need social supports such as adequate transportation and affordable childcare as well as post secondary degree and certification programs that allow job seekers to obtain secure employment. Investments in education and training will be compromised if these important wrap around services and educational resources are not included as essential program components.

This bill will be an investment in the future of Connecticut's families, as well as businesses and our economic prosperity and I urge your support.

Thank you.

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[i] *The Basic Economic Security Tables for Connecticut*, Wider Opportunities for Women, 2012
[ii] *The Basic Economic Security Tables for Connecticut*, Wider Opportunities for Women, 2012
[iii] United Way ALICE Report – Connecticut, 2014.
[iv] 211 Childcare. (2013). Connecticut child care affordability and availability report. Retrieved from www.211childcare.org