

Judiciary Committee  
Governor's H.B. No. 6849: An Act Strengthening Protections for Victims of Human  
Trafficking  
Testimony of the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund  
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The Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF) is a statewide nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering women, girls and their families to achieve equal opportunities in their personal and professional lives. For decades, CWEALF has developed and promoted strategies to increase personal and professional success for women across the state.

As CWEALF continues to advocate for policies protecting the legal rights of women, we support Governor's H.B. No. 6849: *An Act Strengthening Protections for Victims of Human Trafficking*. While the term human trafficking is commonly portrayed in today's media as a brutal form of exploitation practices found solely in foreign nations, the reality is that human trafficking remains a growing problem all over the world, throughout America, and even here in our own state. Since 2012, the number of survivors of human trafficking – the majority of them women and children – has continued to increase in Connecticut.

Human traffickers typically target vulnerable populations such as women and children and use their power to strip away victims' fundamental human rights and needs. Governor's H.B. No. 6849 calls for the strengthening of protections for victims and will provide increased support for women and their families who have felt the devastating effects of human trafficking. Recently, Connecticut received a "D" on Shared Hope International's state report card examining state laws that address human trafficking. According to the report, Connecticut law lacks in strong penalties for buyers and is limited in support and wrap-around services available to victims.

If Connecticut wants to remain at the forefront of progressive policies that support women and families that have endured and survived extraordinary circumstances, including human trafficking, it must continue to take strides in creating policies that provide additional protections to victims. As an organization that advocates for increased legal rights and access to opportunities of women across the state, CWEALF supports this bill specifically for its inclusion of regulations to amend current Connecticut law. Section 4 of H.B No 6849, for example, would eliminate the requirement that force or threat of force, fraud, or coercion be used in sex

trafficking of a minor under the age of 18. It would also add to the Trafficking in Persons Council members who represent child victims of commercial exploitation and sex trafficking. These additions are important in recognizing the particular, sensitive needs of children as critical elements that should impact the policy decisions made in this arena.

CWEALF urges support for Governor's H.B. 6849: *An Act Strengthening Protections for Victims of Human Trafficking* as a way to provide increased support for a population that has had their rights compromised and deserve safety under the law.