



Committee on Labor and Public Employees
Public Testimony of the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund
RE: Proposed Bill No. 428: *An Act Protecting Interns from Workplace Harassment and
Discrimination*

Submitted by: Laura Callachan, MSW Student Intern
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My name is Laura Callachan and I am a first year graduate student at the University Of Connecticut School Of Social Work. Additionally, I am an unpaid policy student intern at 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. On behalf of CWEALF, and myself, I am speaking today in support of Proposed Bill No. 428: *An Act Protecting Interns from Workplace Harassment and Discrimination*.

As someone who has been required to obtain yearly internships since the age of nineteen and throughout my education, I fully see the importance of protecting the rights of unpaid interns. Growing numbers of college and graduate students seek internship placements either on their own initiative or to fulfill requirements of their degree programs. These interns, myself included, can be found throughout the state in both for-profit and non-profit agencies. With interns being such an important component of the Connecticut workforce, why is it that they are not given the same protections as employees?

In today's society the weight of a four-year degree is not always the most important factor in hiring decisions. With more people obtaining post-secondary education, employers have begun to place higher levels of importance on years of workplace experience rather than level of education earned. The best way to achieve workplace experience while obtaining higher education is through internships. Student interns who work for school credit do not demand pay or employer benefits; however because they are not paid members of an agency's staff they are not eligible to receive protection from the law. As an unpaid intern who is receiving school credit, and furthermore, as a person – I believe that I deserve equal protection under the law as paid interns. I deserve to feel protected, safe, and secure in whatever internship, job, or volunteer opportunity I pursue. I have been fortunate not to be a victim of workplace harassment or discrimination during an internship placement but I am familiar with the stories of interns who have not been as lucky.

Until recently, New York City was very similar to Connecticut in the sense that they did not have any laws in place protecting the rights of unpaid interns. After numerous interns stepped forward with stories of sexual harassment and discrimination from their supervisors, the city finally decided to make some changes¹.

I am very thankful for the experiences I had during my undergraduate education in the Connecticut State University system. I attribute many of my successes, including my acceptance into the University of Connecticut, to connections made and lessons learned while interning. Unpaid interns are a valuable part of many organizations and it is important that the rights of these interns are a priority to the state of Connecticut. I strongly believe that if Connecticut works to protect its students, its youth, and its interns, it will, in turn, be protecting its future.

Thank you for allowing me time to present this testimony today. My testimony today is an example of the learning experience I have had at CWEALF since September. CWEALF's information and referral line can be of great assistance to anyone who is experience workplace discrimination or harassment. For more information please go to www.cwealf.org or call 860-524-0601.

¹ Zach Schonfeld. (March, 2014). *The Fight to Protect Unpaid Interns*. Taken from www.newsweek.com