

**Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee**

Proposed House Bill No. 6121, *An Act Establishing a Fund Providing Scholarships to Women Pursuing Degrees in the STEM Field*

Submitted by: Catherine Bailey, Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund  
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My name is Catherine Bailey and I serve as Legal and Public Policy Director 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. For many years, our Research & Evaluation unit has analyzed the status of women and girls in Connecticut, evaluated programs serving women and girls, and created programs to expand opportunities for women and girls to enter nontraditional fields, including science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).

CWEALF's Vocational Equity Research, Training and Evaluation Center (VERTEC) was established in 1988 to increase females' access to, and opportunities in, vocational education programs that are nontraditional for their gender. The research, technical assistance and advocacy that has been provided by CWEALF staff over the last 27 years has established a dynamic base of expertise regarding gender equity, and a more complex race and class analysis of gender equity issues in career and technical education, and specifically, STEM education.

CWEALF, through VERTEC and its unique Generating Girls Opportunity (G<sup>2</sup>O) programs, engages in activities to encourage and promote non-traditional educational and economic opportunities. CWEALF assists formal and informal educators, parents and administrators to provide equitable, nondiscriminatory programs to all students, especially to girls and women in STEM, and encourage enrollment, achievement and completion of gender non-traditional students. This includes day-long "Girls and STEM Expos" that we host for middle-school and high-school girls to engage in hands-on experiences in the STEM fields and widen their understanding of potential career opportunities. We plan and implement an average of five expos per year at local colleges and universities, serving approximately 600 girls and their teachers.

We support Proposed Bill No. 6121, *An Act Establishing a Fund Providing Scholarships to Women Pursuing Degrees in the STEM Fields* because of the dramatically low numbers of college women enrolled in such programs, like engineering and computer science. In data

collected by the Connecticut Department of Higher Education for 2010-2011, only 13% of those pursuing associate's degrees in engineering, and 18% of those pursuing bachelor's degrees in engineering, were women. Similarly, only 18% of those pursuing associate's degrees in computer science and 9% of those pursuing bachelor's degrees in computer science were women.

Despite the low representation of women, jobs in STEM fields are more plentiful and have higher wages. It is estimated that Connecticut will need to fill 116,000 jobs in the STEM fields by 2018.<sup>1</sup> Another appealing aspect of these jobs is that the wage gap between men and women is lower in STEM - 86% as opposed to 78% in other fields - but women only comprise 24% of the sector.<sup>2</sup> By making financial scholarships available to young women entering the STEM fields, we hope that these numbers will continue to increase.

We also urge you to consider strategies that support the retention of women in STEM majors and fields, which significantly impact the representation of women in these careers. For example, even women who study engineering during college are not as likely to pursue careers in that field or remain in the field for as long as their male counterparts. One in three women said they left the field because they did not like the workplace climate, their boss, or the culture.<sup>3</sup> Many college students did not even enter the field after completing their studies. One-third of women said they did not enter engineering after graduation because they perceived the field as inflexible or the culture as non-supportive of women.<sup>4</sup> In order to meaningfully boost the representation of women in the STEM fields, we must consider the factors that will help women to continue their studies, enter these careers, and remain there.

For more information, visit [www.girlsopp.org](http://www.girlsopp.org). Thank you for your consideration.

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<sup>1</sup> *Report to the Governor, The Gender Wage Gap in Connecticut: Findings and Recommendations*, Gender Wage Gap Task Force, November 7, 2013, [http://www.governor.ct.gov/malloy/lib/malloy/2013.11.19\\_gender\\_wage\\_gap\\_in\\_ct.pdf](http://www.governor.ct.gov/malloy/lib/malloy/2013.11.19_gender_wage_gap_in_ct.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Id.

<sup>3</sup> Fouad, Nadya A., Ph.D, Singh, Romila, Ph.D., *Stemming the Tide: Why Women Leave Engineering*, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Id.