



State of Connecticut
COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Central Office ~ 450 Columbus Boulevard, Hartford, CT 06103

Promoting Equality and Justice for all People

Labor and Public Employees Committee
February 16, 2017

Testimony in Support of HB 5591

AN ACT CONCERNING PAY EQUITY IN THE WORKFORCE

Good morning/afternoon Senator Gomes, Representative Porter, Senator Miner and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee. My name is Cheryl A. Sharp and I am Deputy Director of the Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities ("CHRO"). The CHRO investigates and prosecutes claims of discrimination including claims of unequal pay. The CHRO supports House Bill 5291 "An Act Concerning Pay In the Workforce". This proposed bill would have a direct effect on the cases we handle.

This bill aims to correct years of pay inequity for women in our state. According to the most recent statistics from the United States census, the average woman in the state of Connecticut earns 82 % of what the average man earns. That gap widens if you are a woman of color or a woman with a disability according to the most current American Community Survey (ACS) questionnaire. The gender pay gap has lifelong repercussions. In 2015, for example, it contributed to a higher percentage of women living in poverty and affected retirements benefits that are earned over the course of an individual's employment. Even taking into account lifestyle choices such as education sought and time away from work spent parenting, women still earn less which is likely due to discrimination.¹

In Connecticut the CHRO is the government agency that receives pay equity complaints. These cases are often hard to prove given that salary transparency most often does not exist in the private sector. It is easy to get away with paying similarly situated females less than their male colleagues. Unlike years ago women make up about half of the workforce and are often the primary breadwinners. Anything we can do to ensure that women are also entitled to similar pay to their male coworkers who have similar education would help our civil rights mission.

This is a critical time in history to preserve civil rights and the work the Commission does. We should be actively seeking ways to continue our history of treating all employees fairly. This and similar bills support our state's commitment to maintain some of the strongest civil rights laws in the country. The CHRO supports any measure the legislature takes to promote equitable pay in the workforce and has previously provided written testimony supporting a similar bill, **HB-5210**.

The CHRO **supports HB-5591**. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. I am happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.

¹ AAUW The Simple Truth about the Gender Pay Gap Fall 2016 edition.