

**Committee on Labor and Public Employees**

Public Testimony of the CT Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF)

H.B. 5158: *An Act Concerning Breastfeeding in the Workplace*

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The Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF) is a statewide nonprofit that advocates for and empowers women and girls in Connecticut, especially those who are underserved or marginalized. For forty-seven years, CWEALF has been a leader in the development of policy solutions that enhance women's economic security and combat discrimination.

CWEALF urges the committee to support H.B. 5158: *An Act Concerning Breastfeeding in the Workplace*. Current Connecticut state law requires employers to make reasonable efforts to provide a private room to breastfeed; however, women still face significant barriers to breastfeeding and expressing milk at work.

Breastfeeding for the first six months of a child's life is critical to achieve optimal growth and protect infants from childhood illnesses. Breastfeeding provides numerous benefits to mothers including improved short-term health outcomes and a lower risk for developing future diseases. Breastfeeding can also reduce the risk of breast cancer, ovarian cancer, and type 2 diabetes.<sup>1</sup> Breast milk also provides an important source of energy for babies who are 6 months to 23 months old.<sup>2</sup>

The benefits regarding breastfeeding are widely known, yet mothers—especially low-income mothers and women of color—still lack the support they need to continue to breastfeed their children. Research shows that black women struggle to breastfeed successfully because they return to work earlier, receive less information about breastfeeding from their health care providers and have less access to professional support.<sup>3</sup>

Mothers who work in low-wage, on-call scheduling jobs such as retail or food service often cannot afford to take extended leave to care for a newborn and are forced to return to work soon after giving birth. Decisions to breastfeed often depend heavily on working conditions, unpredictable on-call shift schedules, and lack of access to benefits like paid leave after the birth of a child present significant barriers for women, especially low-wage

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3508512/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.who.int/features/factfiles/breastfeeding/en/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/66/wr/mm6627a3.htm>

workers who are disproportionately women of color, to continue to breastfeed after returning to work.

Connecticut law requires employers to provide a reasonable amount of time each day to an employee who needs to express breastmilk and to provide accommodations where an employee can do so privately. House Bill No. 5158 strengthens existing protections for workers who breastfeed and will require an employer to make a reasonable effort to provide a private lactation room in the workplace that is free from intrusion and shielded from the public and is near a refrigerator for breastmilk to be adequately stored.

New parents should not have to choose between breastfeeding their child and continuing to work to support their families. CWEALF recommends that the committee pass H.B. 5158.