



March 23, 2021

The Honorable Catherine F. Abercrombie & Marilyn V Moore
Chairs, Joint Committee on Human Services
Legislative Office Bldg #2000
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Representatives Abercrombie and Moore,

We write to you today in strong support of CT AB 6635, a bill that would extend the time limit for temporary family assistance to sixty months and eliminate the penalties for families with children born after enrollment in the program (family/child cap) and ensure benefits are adequate to meet the cost of living for the beneficiaries. AB 6635 would also exempt the critical benefits received during the COVID-19 public health emergency from being calculated against the time limit for beneficiaries. This bill is a vital step in ensuring that all those who call Connecticut their home and community benefit from our state-shared value of supporting those who need it the most.

If/When/How: Lawyering for Reproductive Justice is a non-profit organization working to transform the law and policy landscape through advocacy, support, and organizing so that all people have the power to determine if, when, and how to define, create, and sustain families with dignity and to actualize sexual and reproductive health and wellbeing on their own terms. We have a growing Connecticut membership in our Reproductive Justice Lawyers Network who all support and work to uplift reproductive justice values. One of our core initiatives is to support the repeal of racist, eugenic family caps in TANF law in the 14 remaining states, like Connecticut, where this outdated policy is still in effect.¹

Welfare family caps are designed to coerce low-income people into not having children and have exacerbated poverty, increasing food and housing insecurity and worsening health and social outcomes.² Nine states repealed their family caps in the last two decades after recognizing that they failed to achieve the desired eugenic outcome of fewer children born to families living in poverty.³ Instead, the caps serve only to

¹ Arizona, Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, North Dakota, South Carolina, and Tennessee. Because Idaho and Wisconsin both have a flat maximum benefit, regardless of family size, they also fall into the category of states with family caps even though their codes don't contain specific family cap language.

² Center on Reproductive Rights and Justice, *Bringing Families out of 'Cap'tivity: the Path Toward Abolishing Welfare Family Caps* (2016).

³ *Id.* Since this article's publication, two more states (Virginia and New Jersey) joined Wyoming, Maryland, California, Nebraska, Minnesota, Illinois, and Oklahoma in repealing their family caps.

discriminate against largely Black and Brown mothers — and are designed to do so, based on the stereotypes about “welfare queens” underlying their initial enactment.⁴

It is an injustice that fully exercising one’s bodily autonomy and decision-making is tied to access to financial resources. The ability to create and define families, like the ability to access healthcare, should not be a function of the color of a person’s skin, their zip code, their class status, or any other discriminatory measure of worth. We know that centuries of segregation and discrimination contribute to continuing economic disparities for Black and Latin@/x families, meaning that the racist and anti-Black history of our nation directly translates to a childhood poverty rate that is much higher for communities of color in Connecticut.⁵ As of 2018, over half of children of color in Connecticut lived below 200% of the federal poverty level. In comparison, 15 percent of White children lived below 200% of the federal poverty level in the state.⁶ Those numbers show a clear disparity between which families in Connecticut have the resources they need to survive, and which do not. Current barriers to TANF assistance fail to acknowledge the structural racism, such as job discrimination, that makes it more difficult for Black and Brown families to meet the high-impossible standards Connecticut imposes upon families who are already struggling.

National data also demonstrates that the impacts of the pandemic and the economic fallout have been widespread, but are particularly prevalent among Black, Latino, Indigenous, and immigrant households.⁷ These disproportionate impacts reflect harsh, longstanding institutional inequities that the current crisis is exacerbating and the dire need to respond to increased TANF caseloads by removing barriers to assistance. AB 6635 is one step toward lifting those barriers, and the passage of this bill would allow families experiencing poverty to increase their financial stability.

Family formation is core to the Reproductive Justice framework and we must interrogate any policies that continue to dictate which families are deserving and undeserving of essential support, especially when the lack of institutional access continues to fall hardest on communities of color. We thank the joint committee for their leadership in bringing this issue to the forefront during a health and economic crisis. States around the country continue to recognize the unduly punitive and discriminatory nature of family caps, and repeals have mounted in recent years. We hope Connecticut will be next in line to rid itself of these vestiges of failed personal responsibility laws that succeed only at driving women and children into deeper poverty.

Sincerely,



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⁴ Center on Reproductive Rights and Justice, *Bringing Families out of ‘Cap’tivity: the Path Toward Abolishing Welfare Family Caps* (2016).

⁵ The Annie E. Casey Foundation Kids Count Data Center, *Children below 200 percent poverty by race in Connecticut* (2018), <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/6726-children-below-200-percent-poverty-by-race?loc=1&loct=2#detailed/2/8/false/1729,37/9,12,1/13820>.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, *Tracking the COVID-19 Recession’s Effect on Food, Housing, and Employment Hardships* (March 22, 2021), <https://www.cbpp.org/research/poverty-and-inequality/tracking-the-covid-19-recessions-effects-on-food-housing-and>.