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**Testimony of  
Samone Ijoma, Fellow, Workplace Justice & Education  
National Women's Law Center  
In SUPPORT of H. 729  
Before the House Judiciary Committee**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony on behalf of the National Women's Law Center. The National Women's Law Center has been working since 1972 to secure and defend women's legal rights and has long worked to remove barriers to equal treatment of women in the workplace, including workplace harassment and discrimination.

The National Women's Law Center Fund LLC also houses and administers the TIME'S UP Legal Defense Fund (TULDF), which provides funding for legal representation and storytelling assistance in select matters challenging workplace sex harassment and related retaliation. Since its founding in 2018, TULDF has received over 5,600 requests for assistance from individuals who have experienced sexual misconduct such as assault, harassment, abuse, and related retaliation in the workplace. These requests for assistance have confirmed that, despite laws at the federal, state, and local levels prohibiting sexual harassment, sexual harassment remains a widespread and pervasive problem, affecting workers in every state, in every kind of workplace setting and industry, and at every level of employment.

We commend the Vermont legislature for being one of the first states to pass meaningful anti-workplace harassment reforms after #MeToo went viral. Despite these important changes to harassment and discrimination laws in the state, there is still more work to be done. For the reasons that follow, we strongly support extending the statute of limitations for discrimination claims.

***Extending the statute of limitations for discrimination claims allows workers adequate time to process potential trauma associated with harassment and seek justice.***

A key barrier to workers' ability to access justice is short statutes of limitations. What we see through TULDF and our work with survivors, advocates, and attorneys across the country, is that many workers do not come forward immediately, or even within the first several months, to report often due to fear of retaliation, shame, humiliation, blame, and fear of not being believed when they do share their experiences.

Unfortunately, these fears are well- founded. Of those who reported sexual harassment to TULDF, over 70 percent reported that they had been retaliated against when they complained about harassment, including being fired and receiving poor performance evaluations.<sup>i</sup> Some of



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these individuals were threatened with legal action, with losing their job, or even physical harm, if they told anyone about their harassment.

In addition to fears of retaliation and processing trauma related to discrimination, harassment, and assault, financial constraints can also present barriers to timely reporting, particularly for low-paid workers who may not have the time and resources needed to find or consult with advocates or attorneys about their rights and need to prioritize finding new employment to keep food on their tables before filing a claim. As a result of all this, we see that many people seeking assistance have run out of time and no longer have legal options available to them to seek justice. The six-year statute of limitations proposed as an amendment to H. 729 will allow victims sufficient time to file their claims.

Vermont would not be the first or only state to see the value in extending the statute of limitations. Many states across the country have recently extended their statute of limitations for bringing workplace discrimination claims, including Oregon, New York, and California. We hope that Vermont will join them this session.

Accordingly, we urge the members of this Committee to show up for working people in the state of Vermont and pass H. 729.

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<sup>1</sup> Coming Forward: Key Trends and Data from the Time's Up Legal Defense Fund (Oct. 2020), [NWLC-Intake-Report\\_FINAL\\_2020-10-13.pdf](#).