



DOMESTIC WORKERS BILL OF RIGHTS: PROTECTING A WORKFORCE IN CRISIS

Domestic workers are the bedrock of a functioning society, yet they are a workforce in crisis.

The Domestic Workers Bill of Rights takes on a new urgency in the wake of the current financial crisis. Among New York's least protected workers, domestic workers are among the first and hardest hit by any economic downturn. In these times, domestic workers are even more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Now more than ever, New York must act to protect the basic rights and human dignity of domestic workers!

Domestic workers call on the New York legislature to pass the Bill of Rights and . . .

1. End the Epidemic of Workplace Abuse

Working behind closed doors, in their employers' homes, domestic workers are uniquely vulnerable to abuse. Without the legal protections guaranteed to other workers, domestic workers routinely endure verbal abuse, dehumanizing treatment, and exploitation. In the worst cases, this lawless industry results in situations where domestic workers are physically abused or sexually assaulted, forced to sleep in quarters unfit for human habitation, and stripped of their privacy and dignity. The extreme vulnerability of domestic workers has led to a physical and mental health crisis. New York must take action to end this crisis now!

2. Give Caregivers the Ability to Care for Themselves

Nannies and caregivers work long hours to ensure the health and safety of the children, disabled relatives, and elderly parents of New Yorkers. Yet these workers can't afford to look after their own health and the health of their families. The vast majority receive no health benefits from their employers, and with no legal entitlement to paid sick days, many workers cannot take time off to deal with illness or medical emergencies. Some are denied sick leave entirely – paid or unpaid. For others, losing even a day or two of pay to see a doctor may mean not being able to afford both food and rent for that month.

3. Standardize an Industry that Leaves Too Much to Chance

Without established and enforceable standards, both workers and employers are left to make them up. In the worst cases, this means employers can do what they please – withholding pay, renegeing on promises, restricting a worker's basic freedom of movement. In the best cases, well-meaning employers simply don't have the information to guide them in setting terms of employment, and they may never draw up a formal contract or clearly establish the rights and obligations each party owes to the other. As a result, domestic workers never know what to expect from their employers, and the treatment they receive is largely a matter of luck. This lawless existence leaves too much to chance. Domestic workers must be able to rely on basic standards that they can expect from each and every employer.