

Testimony of Domestic Workers
Before the New York State Assembly Committee on Labor
Public Hearing on Domestic Employment Conditions in New York State
November 21, 2008, 11:00 a.m.

Testimony of Priscilla González
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Daughter of a Nanny and Housekeeper

My name is Priscilla González, and I am the proud daughter of one of the 200,000 domestic workers who make all other work possible in New York. I am also a full-time organizer with Domestic Workers United. In 2003, I came to DWU like so many of our members, seeking help, guidance, and support.

My mom has been working in the industry for over 15 years. As a nanny and housekeeper, she's often juggled full-time and part-time work to make ends meet for our family. She's worked with several families and in many homes throughout New York City and also Connecticut. Sometimes, I'd go to her work when I got out of school. Other times, I'd work alongside her as an assistant when a housecleaning job was going to be particularly massive. Then, on other occasions, I'd do my best to advocate on her behalf, as most kids whose mothers do this work tend to do. So I've gotten to know most of her employers pretty well.

I don't tend to discuss her experiences before an audience like this, because I've always honored her right to share them if and how she chooses to do that. Speaking out is not something that can easily be done in the domestic work industry. So I speak before you today with her blessing, to talk about the impact that a lack of protections and benefits has meant for our family, and as an organizer who, over the course of several years in that capacity, has counseled, supported, and with my *compañeras*, organized hundreds of workers to expose the innumerable indignities and violations that take place in the domestic work industry.

Like so many others, my mom has endured disrespectful treatment, low wages, and workplace injuries. One employer made fun of her accent by mimicking her, saying he couldn't understand a word she said and that she should learn to speak English properly. She called me on the phone when he left. I was on my way to get her, but through muffled tears, she said she needed to stay, that we needed the money. Another refused to pay her more than \$8/hour in 2004, on the grounds that anything more would be too expensive, for working 12-hour days, taking care of two children, and doing the housekeeping for a duplex apartment for which the employer paid \$11,000/month. The same one said to me one day, in front of my mom, that I could probably make a lot of money charging her children's peers' parents for Spanish tutoring – something she got for free by “hiring maids that speak other languages.”

Still, in another household, one particularly mischievous child tripped her while on the stairs, causing her to fall forward, seriously injuring her already fragile knees, and

breaking her front teeth. When I called her employers to follow up on the medical bills we'd forwarded to them, they accused her of lying and that I should talk reason to her. After threatening to bring in a lawyer, they acquiesced to paying the majority. To this day, eight years later, long after the family moved to another state, I'm still struggling to pay back her medical loans for the follow-up care that continues to this day.

My mom and I are fortunate, however, because we have each other, and we have DWU. For thousands of others, who are alone in this country or held captive in their employers' homes, the reality is frightening. And so it is that as the daughter of a domestic worker, and as an organizer, it is my responsibility to be alert and to always be ready to respond to any situation.

Given the conditions that I know prevail in the domestic work industry, I memorize my mom's weekly schedule and keep a roster of her employers' full names, home and work addresses, and phone numbers. But it shouldn't have to be the case. As one of the most vulnerable work sectors, evidenced by the testimonies you're hearing today, comprehensive legislation is needed now. One more day without the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights means one more day that a worker is abused, denigrated, and exploited and one more day that her family, her children, suffer beside her.

It's time that domestic work be recognized, respected, and protected. This is the workforce that ensures that families, homes and ultimately societies are healthy and functional. I beseech you to do what is right and just for New York. You have the power to make the difference for thousands of domestic workers.