



## Washington DC Domestic Workers Bill of Rights

**Summary:** A domestic workers bill of rights in DC would eliminate the historic exclusions of domestic workers from DC's human rights protections and occupational safety and health protections. The bill would also require written employment agreements for domestic work and establish a Domestic Work Outreach and Education Program in the District. This bill comes out of the lived experiences of domestic workers in the DC Chapter of the National Domestic Workers Alliance, which, since its inception in 2017, has grown to about 150 active members.

**Background:** Domestic workers are the nannies, house cleaners, and home care workers whose work makes all other work possible. These workers—mostly women of color and often immigrants—power the economy by freeing up the time and attention of DC residents to do their own work. Despite its importance, domestic work continues to be devalued. This devaluation is a direct remnant of the legacy of slavery in the US. After domestic workers were written out of basic federal labor protections, many states and DC adopted the same legal exclusions.

**Problem:** Domestic workers in DC have no legal protection against employment discrimination and harassment. Most domestic workers belong to groups that have historically been marginalized and targeted for discrimination: women, people of color, immigrants, and older workers. And, because their work is isolated in private homes, they are vulnerable to discrimination—including sexual harassment. Under DC's current law, domestic workers have no recourse if they experience discrimination or harassment.

Domestic workers are also excluded from the right to a healthy and safe workplace. During the COVID-19 pandemic, they have continued to work without protections, often without adequate PPE, putting their lives at risk as well as their families and communities. Employers too, have struggled without guidance on how they can create a safe workplace. The pandemic has highlighted the importance of workplace safety protections for domestic workers.

Domestic work remains a low-wage, under-regulated industry. Violations of the rights that domestic workers *do* have, like wage and hour, are extremely common. At the same time, reporting is rare because workers do not know their rights or fear retaliation. DC needs an outreach and education approach tailored to this unique industry.

**Solutions:** 1) Include domestic workers in the same human rights protections and occupational safety and health protections as other DC workers; 2) Require written agreements between domestic workers and hiring entities, and publish a model agreement, to ensure workers know their rights and employers are aware of their responsibilities; and 3) Establish a Domestic Work Outreach and Education Program within the Department of Employment Services (DOES). DOES will collaborate with organizations that work with domestic workers and employers to provide education and training on labor standards in the industry.

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