

Washington DC Domestic Workers Bill of Rights

B24-0712 - Domestic Worker Employment Rights Amendment Act of 2022
Introduced by DC Councilmember Elissa Silverman

Summary: The District of Columbia has over 9,040 domestic workers. A domestic workers bill of rights in DC would eliminate the historic exclusions of domestic workers from protection under DC’s human rights and occupational safety and health laws. The bill would also require written employment agreements for domestic work and establish a Domestic Work Outreach and Education Program in the District.

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. Domestic work is essential work, yet continues to be excluded from full labor protections because of the historic racist and sexist devaluation of caregiving and household work, rooted in the legacy of slavery in the U.S.

Problem: Domestic workers in DC have no legal protection against employment discrimination and harassment. Most domestic workers belong to historically marginalized groups that have been targeted for discrimination: women, people of color, immigrants, and older workers. Because their work is isolated in private homes, domestic workers are extremely vulnerable to discrimination—including sexual harassment. Yet under DC’s current law, they have no recourse for these abuses.

Domestic workers are also excluded from the right to a healthy and safe workplace. During the COVID-19 pandemic, they 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.

Domestic work remains a low-wage, under-regulated industry. Violations of the rights that domestic workers *do* have, like minimum wage and overtime protections, are extremely common. 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 in the DC Domestic Workers Bill of Rights:

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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