

VALUING DOMESTIC WORK

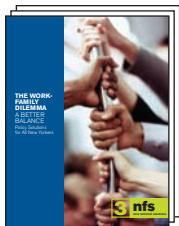
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VALUING DOMESTIC WORK

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Published by the Barnard Center for Research on Women

In recent years, the Barnard Center for Research on Women (BCRW) has made a concerted effort to engage with feminist struggles advancing racial, economic, social, and global justice. We have built invaluable cooperative relationships with a far-reaching network of scholars, activists, and artists who contribute to the long struggle to make our world more just.

This report is based on a three-year collaboration with Domestic Workers United (DWU) and the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA). BCRW was proud to host the first National Domestic Workers Alliance congress at Barnard College in 2008 and subsequently the first East Coast Regional Congress in 2009. Together BCRW, DWU, and NDWA developed this publication in order to further knowledge about the processes by which domestic work has been devalued historically and how we can all work together to make domestic work safe, fair, and protected.

Founded in 2000, Domestic Workers United (DWU) is an organization of Caribbean, Latina, Asian, and African nannies, housekeepers, and caregivers for the elderly in New York City, organizing for power, respect, and fair labor standards and building a movement to end exploitation and oppression for all.

The National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA) was formed at the US Social Forum in 2007. NDWA seeks to organize the over 2.5 million domestic workers in the United States for respect, recognition and fair labor standards. Through leadership development, strategic campaigns, and alliance building, NDWA helps to build a vibrant movement for social and global justice.

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www.domesticworkersunited.org

The National Domestic Workers Alliance

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BACKGROUND

Why is domestic work devalued?

They labor in other people’s homes: preparing the meals, walking the dog, running errands, changing diapers, rocking infants to sleep for an afternoon nap, barely catching their breath before folding the laundry and cleaning the bathrooms. They often leave their own children in order to care for someone else’s. They work longer hours than their employers. They arrive before their employers leave for work and are off only after their employers return home. They perform the critical work of social reproduction—household maintenance and care work—that sustains the current generation of workers and raises the next generation. Without private household workers, life would grind to a halt for the middle and upper class families who hire them. Were it not for their assistance, many doctors, lawyers, professors, stockbrokers, and business owners would be unable to carry out their familial responsibilities or perform their professional duties. Yet, despite the essential role that domestic workers play in household maintenance, they are often underpaid, sometimes abused, and frequently undervalued for the work they perform.

Domestic service is a degraded occupation. Its low status is informed in part by the gendered and racialized composition of the workforce. For most of US history, paid domestic work was performed by African American and immigrant women. During the 19th century, domestic workers in the North were mostly Irish immigrant women; in the West, they were Asian or Latina; in the South, African American women—first as slaves and

then as freed people—worked in the homes of white families. During World War I and World War II, African Americans left the segregation, violence, and declining agricultural sector of the South in search of better paying manufacturing jobs in the North and West. While a few African American women found unskilled work in factories, the vast majority were relegated to domestic service. They worked as housekeepers, nannies, cooks, and washerwomen. Until the 1960s, domestic work was one of the very few occupations open to them (Clark-Lewis 1996, Dill 1993, Hunter 1997).

Domestic work has historically been identified as undignified and “dirty” work. Historian Phyllis Palmer has suggested that this work divides women by race and class by defining domestic workers as “dirty” and defining the women who benefit from their labor as “clean” (Palmer 1989). For example, the purity of 19th century Victorian womanhood, in the US and in Europe, was premised on someone else performing the drudgery of household labor.

In addition, the long-standing association of domestic work with women’s unpaid household labor has sometimes made it difficult for others to see it as “real work.” Most unpaid domestic labor performed by women for their families has no monetary value, is not calculated into the GDP, and does not show up in government statistics of “hours worked.” It is, in the words of Judith Rollins, “invisible” work (Rollins 1985). When it comes to unpaid domestic labor, there is no such thing as a day off. Much of the work, quite simply, has to get done each



BRONX SLAVE MARKETS

In the 1930s in New York City, in the midst of the Great Depression, black domestic workers desperate for employment gathered on street corners to offer their services to prospective employers. These informal centers of employment—dubbed the “Bronx Slave Markets” by two African American activists and journalists, Marvel Cooke and Ella Baker—came to symbolize the particular vulnerability of domestic workers (Baker and Cooke 1935). Exploiting their desperation, employers bargained to pay as small a fee as possible. If they were paid at all—and some weren’t—domestic workers went home after ten or eleven hours of back-breaking labor with as little as fifteen, twenty, or twenty-five cents an hour.

and every day. For generations women performed this oft-considered “labor of love” for little or no pay and without recognition.

If the work is not recognized, neither are the workers. Paid domestic laborers are treated simultaneously as invisible and as the personal property of their employer. In the minds of some employers, the racial makeup of the workforce—which encourages employers to construct their employees as vastly different and inferior—justifies low wages and poor working conditions. The “othering” of domestic workers reconciles for abusive employers their own sense of fairness and the inhumane treatment they mete out to workers. At the same time, the intimate nature of the work fosters a fiction of familiarity where employers claim their household help as “one of the family” and use this claim to extract additional work without pay or to offer second-hand goods in lieu of pay. Although domestic

workers may be expected to fulfill familial responsibilities, they are rarely accorded familial rights—even such basic rights as sitting at the dinner table. Live-in workers in particular are often at the beck and call of their bosses, with little time to themselves and no clearly defined job description. For many employers, hiring domestic workers is not limited to hiring their services or their time—it is conflated with the purchasing of their very bodies.

In the US, the racial politics of domestic work profoundly influenced its treatment in labor legislation in the first half of the 20th century (Smith 2000, Palmer 1995). When New Deal labor legislation was enacted in the 1930s, Southern Congressmen, concerned about maintaining control over the African American labor force, insisted on the exclusion of domestic and agricultural workers from Social Security, minimum wage, and collective bargaining laws.¹ Consequently, domestic workers were denied the

1. The most important components of New Deal labor legislation include the Social Security Act, which provides retirement and unemployment benefits to workers, the Fair Labor Standards Act, which guarantees a minimum wage and overtime pay, and the National Labor Relations Act, which gives workers the right to organize and bargain collectively.

basic labor protections and avenues for protest guaranteed to nearly all others in the American workforce. Domestic workers, in fact, were not given Social Security until 1950. They only earned the right to a minimum wage and overtime pay in 1974—in response to a national organizing effort by African American domestic workers.² But, even with the passage of this law, babysitters and companions for the elderly are still excluded from minimum wage provisions, and live-in workers are not granted overtime pay. In addition, even today, domestic workers do not have the right to unionize or to bargain collectively. Moreover, domestic workers are excluded from the Occupational Health and Safety Act and civil rights employment laws, which apply only to businesses with fifteen or more employees. This lack of legal protection has resulted in a particularly vulnerable workforce that is left at the mercy of employers. This vulnerability is compounded by the isolated nature of the work, which makes oversight and enforcement of existing laws difficult.

Since the 1970s, the field of domestic service has expanded in response to shifts in women’s work patterns. As higher percentages of women went to work, they felt a pressing need for help managing the “second shift” (Hochschild 1989). Cleaning gadgets and take-out dinners did not seem to lighten the domestic burden; neither did husbands, partners, or boyfriends. More and more families turned to private household cleaners, home health care aides, and nannies, while others depended on newly available day care services as well as after-school programs and other public support. Over the past twenty years,

however, relentless attacks on the welfare state and public services—which resulted in declining investment in day care, fewer after-school programs, less public support for elder-care programs, the privatization of health care as hospital stays were radically shortened, and fewer social services for the needy and sick—increased the number of households that hire domestic workers.

Domestic Work in a Global Economy

In the 1990s, the rising demand for domestic service was filled by growing numbers of immigrant women. This was also a by product of the changes in global capitalism and the US labor market over the past twenty years that led to greater reliance on women’s labor (Anderson 2000, Chang 2000, Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001). The direct economic effects of globalization (e.g., debt reduction programs that cut social service spending), along with the effects of armed conflict and political oppression, provide the impetus for many women to look outside their home countries for work. Today, women migrate in large numbers from poorer countries, often referred to as the “Global South” (i.e. Southeast Asia, Central America, and Africa), to the wealthy “Global North” (i.e. Western Europe and North America) and in increasing numbers to wealthy Gulf states (Indonesia to Saudi Arabia is a noted route). They work in the homes of the rich and fill gaps in care left by the growing number of women who have recently begun to work in the formal labor sector.

Globalization has produced a shift in manufacturing

2. Most agricultural workers were given Social Security benefits in 1954 and minimum wage guarantees in 1966, although they were only brought up to minimum wage parity with other workers in 1977. Like domestic workers, agricultural workers are still excluded from the NLRA.

jobs from the Global North to the Global South, where factories dedicated to producing exports for wealthy countries have sought out poor women who are paid very little to produce goods previously made by relatively highly paid manufacturing workers in the Global North. The decline in the US manufacturing sector has been matched with the emergence of centers of capital and finance, like New York City, which Saskia Sassen refers to as “global cities” (Sassen 2004). The shift in manufacturing combined with the rise of “finance capital” has increased migration from South to North. Sassen argues that globalization is marked by not just the movement of capital but also the movement of people. While global cities attract investment bankers and financiers, they also attract people, especially women, fleeing increasingly impoverished countries in search of employment. These global hubs are filled with low-paid service workers—taxi drivers, janitors, restaurant staff, retail employees, and domestic workers—who enable the smooth functioning of day-to-day life. This new flow of global capital has resulted in new forms of stratification based on race, class, gender, nationality, and occupation—what sociologist Rhacel Parreñas calls the international division of reproductive labor—where poor women of color are doing the child and elder care for wealthy, mostly white families in industrialized countries (Parreñas 2001, Repak 1995).

Women who leave their home countries to avoid danger and with the hope of creating a better life often arrive in wealthy countries to find that the life of a migrant domestic worker affords no more protection or opportunity than what they left behind. Discrimination based on gender, religion,



and nationality in both sending and receiving countries creates an environment that places migrant women at risk for exploitation. Even educated women with work experience face discrimination when they leave their home countries and they often turn to domestic work due to a lack of other opportunities. According to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), “female migrants are disproportionately affected by the phenomena of deskilling and downgrading.” Because their education or skills are not valued in the receiving country, many are forced to take jobs for which they are over-educated or otherwise overqualified.



In Spain, for example, 47.6% of foreign-born women are in jobs for which they are overqualified, compared to 24.4% of native-born women. In Austria, these figures are 24.8% compared to 9.3%, respectively (OSCE 2009).

As fewer women are at home to fulfill the daily care demands of families and extended families, and as life expectancy increases and the population ages, the need for care (including home health care and other forms of domestic work) is rising. This demand for labor, particularly the demand for migrant domestic workers, is one of startling proportions and will necessitate the creation of immigration and labor

policies that take into account the particular nature and value of care. Establishment of a named career trajectory that recognizes the skills involved in domestic work and that leads to a path to citizenship for immigrant women, together with the creation of new labor standards at the state and federal levels are but a few examples of what will be needed. The first steps in the process of creating fair labor standards are support for the organizing of domestic workers and sharing information about organizing efforts in order to increase public awareness of the impact and importance of these policies in the lives of workers.



ORGANIZING & LEGISLATION

Legislation, including the New York Domestic Workers Bill of Rights and labor law inclusion for all workers, ensures basic protections and equal recognition for the industry under the law. While they establish an important starting point, regulations do not transform or inspire. Relying solely on legislative solutions does not address the core problems in the industry (including gender and racial discrimination, animosity toward immigrants, and devaluing of care work) that have kept it invisible and informal throughout history. Organizing on the local, national, and international level is necessary not only to create legislation and minimum standards, but also to move beyond these basics to a broader vision of justice and rights for all excluded workers, including domestic workers.

History of Domestic Worker Organizing

Domestic workers in the US have a very long history of organizing. In the 1880s, three thousand African American washerwomen in Atlanta organized a strike for higher rates of pay, affecting nearly the entire city (Hunter 1997). In the 1930s, household workers formed unions and associations to protect against widespread abuse and exploitation. The Domestic Workers Union in New York in the late 1930s, for example, had a membership of one thousand and fought for contractual rights. In the 1960s, a nationwide domestic workers' rights movement lobbied for dignity, professionalization, and greater legal protections (Boris and Nadasen 2008, Nadasen 2010, Cobble 2004, Beck 2001). African American female domestic workers involved in or inspired by civil rights activity sought to redefine employer-employee relations and fought for a minimum wage, overtime pay, and paid leave.

Over the past twenty years, there has been a resurgence of domestic worker activism. In an era when the union-busting tactics of corporations are everyday news and when companies' efforts at streamlining, downsizing,

and outsourcing have led to a dramatic decline in manufacturing jobs in the United States, domestic worker activism is an unexpected sign of hope. Domestic workers are charting a new approach to labor organizing for a reconstituted workforce. Changes in economic structures have led to a growing workforce of informal, temporary, and subcontracted workers excluded from traditional labor laws. Many of these service sector workers, who are largely women and immigrants, are paid well below prevailing wage rates, work only part-time, and do not receive benefits. Workers are viewed as easily replaceable and are often hired by subcontractors who take little responsibility for their working conditions. Immigrant workers, many of whom leave their families in their home countries and send remittances back, are sometimes paid "off the books." These workers, who generally have little power, frequently change employers or occupations.

These patterns are particularly evident in domestic service. Many domestic workers are undocumented, do not speak English, and have minimal knowledge of the workings of the American political and legal system. In

addition, the location of domestic work in the ostensibly private space of the home shrouds the exploitation that takes place behind closed doors. Domestic workers are a particularly vulnerable workforce, subject to the whim of employers. While employers may be kind, generous, and understanding, they may still be unaware of how to create a good job in their homes. Other employers have proven to be cruel and abusive. Indeed, the imbalance of power, without checks and balances, makes this occupation unnecessarily risky. Bringing to light the abuse that takes place in the privacy of the home has been a central goal of domestic worker organizing.

In organizing this marginalized workforce, which is shut out of most mainstream labor unions and denied National Labor Relations Act protections, domestic workers around the country have fostered innovative campaigns, and in the process are modeling a new transnational, feminist vision for the labor movement. Traditional labor strategies, such as strikes, are not a viable option because of the multitude of employers, who generally only hire one employee, and the ease with which employees can be replaced. Nonetheless, domestic workers sponsor testimonials, create support groups for isolated workers, hold public “shaming” demonstrations to embarrass abusive employers, and push for protective legislation (Boris and Nadasen 2008, Das Gupta 2008, Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001).

Domestic workers have shifted the site of organizing from the workplace or the factory to the neighborhood. Community organizations, such as workers’ centers, have been a moving force and building block for this new type

of immigrant labor organizing. Domestic workers come together not in labor unions, per se, but in neighborhood formations that speak to workers’ multifaceted needs. As they build their movement, organizers—housekeepers and nannies with their charges in tow—converge on the playgrounds and city centers. Some of them use their precious days off to assist in the mobilization effort. Bringing along their knapsacks with buttons, brochures, and flyers, they sit down to chat with other domestic workers about the work conditions and exploitative situations they have experienced—and, more importantly, to talk about what they, collectively, can do about it.

Domestic workers seek broad protections for workers, rather than benefits from particular employers. They are calling for labor rights outside of citizenship or legal status. They not only organize in a sector historically considered “unorganizable” but also count among their members the very people from which most unions have shied away: poor women of color (Milkman 2006, Tait 2005). And because their constituency is predominantly women of color, many of whom are immigrants, domestic workers have integrated an analysis of race, culture, ethnicity, nation, and gender into their organizing strategies. Their international potluck dinners and multilingual chants are evidence that culture, language, and ethnicity are essential elements of their bonds of solidarity (Fine 2007, Gordon 2005, Rivchin 2004). They have identified the particular needs of women workers and, for example, provide child care and serve meals at meetings, so workers are not forced to choose between

caring for their families and engaging in organizing.

Moreover, domestic worker activism has prompted mainstream policy makers, politicians, and labor organizers to rethink the very definition of labor. Historically, work and family were considered distinct spheres: work occurred outside the home in a public space and was intertwined with the market and politics; home was a site of peace and tranquility, a nurturing refuge for family activities. Domestic worker organizing has called into question this dichotomy, exposing the way in which supposed oppositions like public/private or work/home are interconnected. The collapsing of these dichotomies suggests that paid and unpaid household work is an essential component of a functioning economy, and that domestic labor needs to be valued, respected, and fairly compensated. By bridging the gap between productive and reproductive labor, domestic worker organizing offers a feminist lens in thinking about work, family, and social change. It seeks to value equally all work and provide adequate protections for all workers.

National Domestic Workers Alliance

Dozens of domestic worker organizations emerged in the 1990s. Among these are Domestic Workers United (DWU) in New York, CHIRLA (Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles) in California; Unity Housecleaners of the Workplace Project in Long Island, New York; CASA de Maryland; and Mujeres Unidas y Activas in the San Francisco Bay Area. At the US Social

Forum in Atlanta in 2007, thirteen domestic workers' rights groups from around the country formed a National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA). This was the first such national organization since the early 1970s. One year later, in June 2008, over a hundred activists from around the country came together at Barnard College in New York City to talk about how to move forward as a National Alliance (Ratner 2008).

Today, the NDWA has gathered thirty member organizations from California to New York, with the mission of organizing: to improve the living and working conditions of domestic workers; to win respect and justice from employers and the government; to challenge the racism and sexism that has led to the persistent devaluing of domestic work; to end the exclusion of domestic workers from recognition and legal protection as a workforce; and to continue a brave legacy of resistance by supporting organizing efforts among all workers and communities for justice. Members are active on the local level with their own campaigns and can volunteer to work on infrastructure, capacity building, and/or local, national, or international campaigns for NDWA. In addition to domestic worker advocacy, NDWA members also participate in broader movement-building efforts and in 2010 led a delegation of women to Arizona to protest a new discriminatory law that has potentially devastating effects on immigrant women and families.

State and Local Initiatives

The NDWA member organizations in New York, led by

Domestic Workers United (DWU), have been organizing tirelessly for a “Domestic Workers Bill of Rights” in the state legislature. In June 2008, the New York State Assembly passed a bill that eliminates the exclusion of domestic workers from protections in existing state labor laws including: over time pay; protection from discrimination and sexual harassment; inclusion in the state collective bargaining laws; a minimum of one day of rest per week; and inclusion for part-time and full-time domestic workers in disability laws. In addition, it proposed a study on the feasibility of collective bargaining for domestic workers. In June 2010, the New York State Senate passed an even stronger bill that includes notice of termination and paid time off. On July 1, 2010 the two chambers and the Governor’s office entered into negotiations and reconciled the two bills, agreeing upon a cohesive bill that includes all of the provisions in the Assembly bill and a minimum of three days paid leave per year. The legislation for paid leave was a breakthrough; no other workforce receives paid days off as a matter of law. This historic legislative effort has already inspired similar advocacy within other member organizations of the NDWA. In California, for example, a bill of rights has been developed by domestic worker organizers and is currently being proposed as a State Resolution. (See Appendix A for the “New York Bill of Rights” and Appendix B for the “California Bill of Rights”).

Federal Initiatives

Over the past century, the United States has improved federal labor standards in order to help ensure that most

workers are paid fair wages, are able to work under safe and healthy conditions, are protected from discriminatory and abusive treatment, and are equipped with the right to engage in collective bargaining. Domestic workers have been consistently excluded from these most basic workplace protections. Whether it is because they are excluded from the definition of “employee” or because their workplace does not meet the minimum number of employees³ they are left without many of the protections guaranteed to other workers.

NDWA has partnered with the Yale University Worker and Immigrant Rights Law Clinic to draft a set of five regulatory reforms that can be immediately enacted by the Department of Labor. These reforms would make a significant difference in workers’ abilities to assert the limited rights they currently have under federal law:

1. Recordkeeping: A small regulatory change would require a record of hours worked for live-in domestic workers, and employers would bear the burden of proof for these hours should a dispute arise.
2. Deductions for Room/Board: Employers are permitted to deduct the cost of room and board from the salary of domestic workers; however, the current regulation does not require proof of the actual value of the deductions, only a “fair value” amount. While domestic workers around the world and the US are largely against in-kind payments except in certain circumstances, the

3. As an example of this, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act which protects workers from discrimination only applies to workplaces with 15 or more employees.

IN AN ERA WHEN THE UNION-BUSTING TACTICS OF CORPORATIONS ARE EVERYDAY NEWS AND WHEN COMPANIES' EFFORTS AT STREAMLINING, DOWNSIZING, AND OUTSOURCING HAVE LED TO A DRAMATIC DECLINE IN MANUFACTURING JOBS IN THE UNITED STATES . . . DOMESTIC WORKER ACTIVISM IS AN UNEXPECTED SIGN OF HOPE.

US government has indicated that barring them altogether would not be feasible. Thus, advocates propose an affirmative “opt-in” system for these in-kind payments in which the deductions are not permitted to be taken automatically, as well as more definition and guidance for employers on the meaning of adequate room and board, and lowering of the deduction dollar amount. At a minimum, workers and advocates universally recommend that for credit the lodging provided should be a private room with a lock, and should include access to a kitchen, laundry facilities, and the ability to communicate privately, and that the worker be provided with a key to the premises.

3. **Sleeping Time:** Current regulations are not clear enough to protect workers who are forced to sleep in the house and are expected to wake in the night to care for children or elderly/disabled charges. Workers and advocates are asking that this time be compensated at a minimum wage for being on call, which could, for example, be a percentage of the



THE INTERNATIONAL LABOR ORGANIZATION (ILO)

The ILO is a part of the United Nations and is responsible for setting standards on international labor rights and monitoring how they are implemented. Through a unique tripartite system, bringing together workers, employers, and governments, the ILO produces Conventions and Recommendations for global labor standards for its 183 member countries. A Convention is an agreement that is crafted by the ILO through discussion between all parties from all member countries. After the Conventions are completed, individual governments must ratify them. The Conventions then shape how that government will treat that particular labor matter in its country's laws. Recommendations, like resolutions, are symbolic declarations and suggestions for governments about issues that the ILO deems important. Although they are not binding, Recommendations can supplement a Convention and provide important guidance for governments on how to implement the Convention. In 2010 and 2011, the ILO will be focused on the creation of the first Convention on domestic work. It has agreed to create both a Convention and recommendations for how governments should treat domestic work in labor law. This decision represents the first, formal recognition of domestic work in international labor law and would be a huge step forward in the struggle for domestic work to be recognized as worthy of the same protections as any other type of work.

THE PROCESS OF MAKING AN ILO CONVENTION

The "Governing Body" of the ILO is a group of 28 government representatives, 12 employer representatives, and 14 worker representatives. It is elected by the member states, and makes decisions on the budget and the agenda for the International Labor Conference (ILC), which takes place each summer in Geneva, Switzerland. When a proposal (e.g., a Convention protecting the rights of domestic workers) is raised by a member state, the governing body decides whether to add it to the agenda for discussion and adoption at the ILC.

When a proposal has been approved for discussion at the ILC, the tripartite stakeholders (government, employer, and worker) from every member country receive a background report and questionnaire from the ILO that asks opinions about the form of the instrument {the "instrument" can be a Convention (binding to those who ratify), a Recommendation (advisory), or a Convention with a Recommendation}, what points or rules the instrument should contain, and who it should cover or exclude. After the responses have been received, the ILO Secretariat drafts proposed conclusions, which are discussed and debated at the summer ILC. Often these negotiations are spread over two sessions (two years) of the ILC, as the series of committee processes, debates, drafting, and votes can be lengthy. If the ILC votes in favor of a Convention, the next step is ratification by member states. The ILO actively campaigns for wide ratification and provides ongoing technical assistance to member states to help them comply once they've ratified.

The ILO's Core Labor Standards (also known as the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work), set in 1998, "are required to be upheld by all member states, regardless of whether they have ratified the relevant Conventions" (ILO). The Core Labor Standards are: 1. freedom of association and the right to organize; 2. prohibition of child labor; 3. prohibition of forced labor; and 4. protection from discrimination.



THE ILO AND DOMESTIC WORKERS

In the past, other ILO Conventions have cited the rights of domestic workers (for example, Convention 29 on Forced Labour, Convention 182 on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, and Convention 177 on Home Work). The UN's International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) are also referenced by these previous conventions, as the majority of domestic workers are women and children, and many are migrant workers. However, some ILO Conventions explicitly

allow governments and employers to exclude domestic workers through so-called "flexibility clauses" (ILO Report IV.1, pages 22-24). These exclusionary allowances are included in conventions on occupational health and safety, maternity protections, minimum wages and medical care and sickness benefits. In addition, the Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138), aimed at eradicating child labor, which is one of the fundamental Conventions, allows governments to exclude under-age domestic workers from its protections.

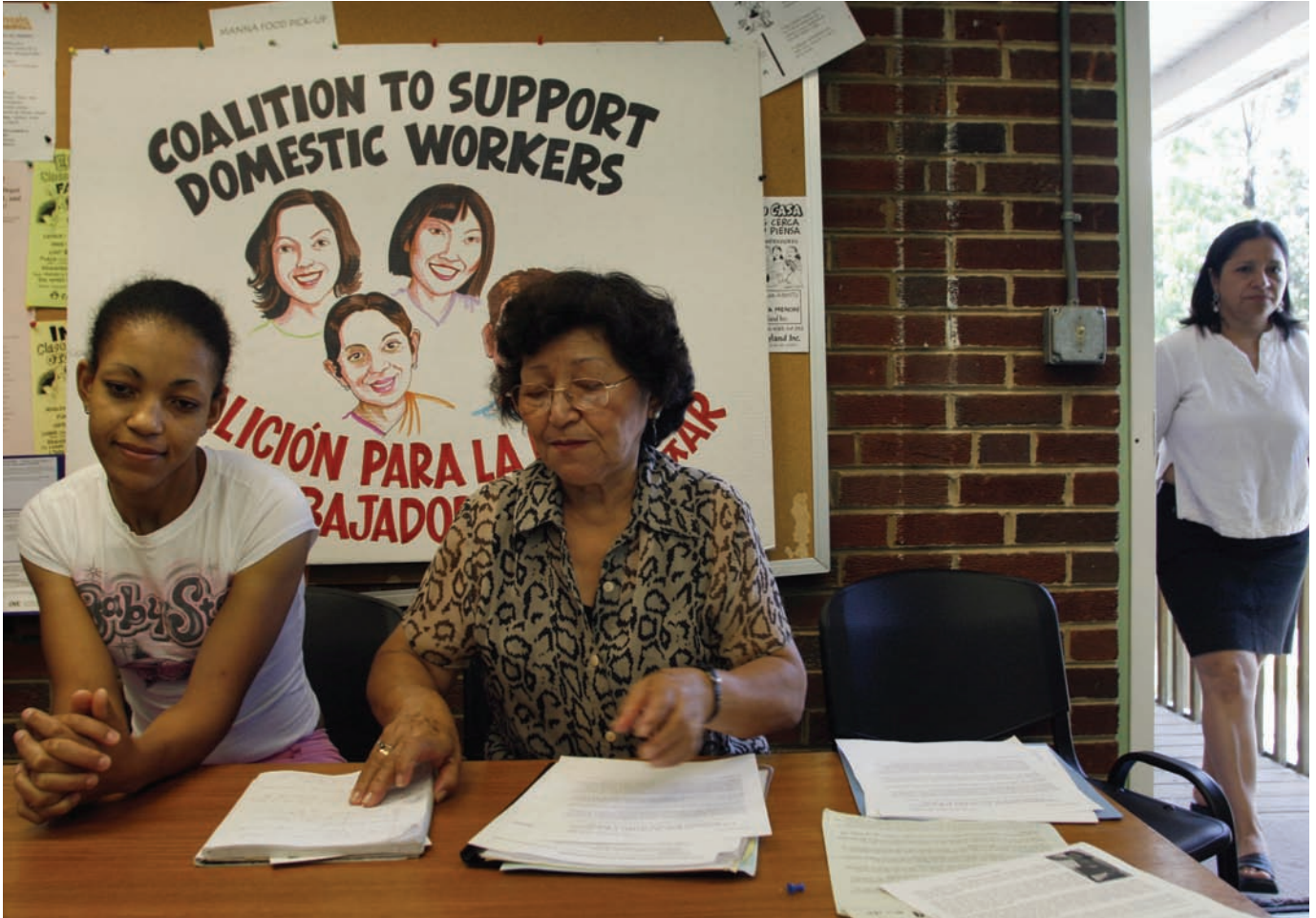
Discussion of the "Decent Work for Domestic Workers" ILO Convention, however, is the first ILO process to focus attention on this growing international workforce. It aims to provide a strong definition of domestic work for international labor law, to establish core minimum standards, including living standards for live-in domestic workers, and protections for migrant domestic workers. A historic process, the adoption of this convention has brought the plight of domestic workers to the forefront of the consciousness of trade union federations, governments, and employer representatives in 183 countries. It has also led to increased collaboration across domestic worker organizations and unions internationally and between those organizations and their national trade union federations.

Workers are also proposing that the Convention include mechanisms for health and safety protections, including enforcement strategies appropriate for the industry. The most effective model, according to advocates, would be an enforced system of regulations and inspections, combined with strong outreach and education for workers and employers

about rights and responsibilities related to occupational health and safety. In the US, while there is broad consensus between government and worker responses on this topic, there remains some significant debate with employers who have raised concerns regarding privacy and safety inspections.

Another issue is whether part-time workers should qualify for coverage under the Convention, particularly given that in some places part-time workers are already covered by national social security protections. Many countries (see box on South Africa), have already extended protections to part-time workers, and others are working toward it. Thus, advocates and workers argue that the exclusion of part-time workers from the ILO Convention would (unintentionally) lower standards.





regular hourly wage.

4. Creation of a Domestic Worker Bureau within the Department of Labor: The creation of a Domestic Workers Bureau within the Department of Labor, with trained officers and extended hours, would provide domestic workers with a safe way to complain if their rights have been violated. It would also allow the Department of Labor to create specialized outreach campaigns to educate domestic employers about their legal obligations and domestic workers about their rights at work.

International Initiatives

Following the first ever international conference of domestic workers in 2006, hosted by the FNV trade union confederation in the Netherlands, domestic worker organizations and trade unions from around the world came together to form the International Domestic Workers Network (IDWN). After decades of organizing for domestic workers' rights, the issue is finally taking center stage at the international Labor Organization (ILO) (see box).

In June 2010 and 2011, the ILO will debate, and then vote whether to adopt, an international standard for the rights of domestic workers during the annual International Labor Conference (ILC). The ILO’s mission is to create decent work for all, and the representatives of trade unions, employers, and the 183 member countries of the ILO are charged in this process with developing international standards to create decent work for domestic workers.

The NDWA is partnering with the International Domestic Workers Network, the International Working Group on Domestic Work, and global unions, including International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers’ Associations (IUF), the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), and Public Services International (PSI) to shape this historic debate. NDWA has partnered with the AFL-CIO, the official representatives of labor from the United States, to participate in the labor delegation to the ILO for the “Decent Work for Domestic Workers” convention negotiations. One of the first trade union delegations to welcome domestic workers’ organizations into their delegation, the partnership provided an international model for involvement of these organizations in the ILO convention process.

For domestic workers around the world, an ILO Convention would mean that they and their work are finally recognized as deserving of the rights, protections and safety nets offered to other workers.

Preliminary Discussion Areas

The process for the development of the ILO Convention begins with a preparatory questionnaire that each party—employers, labor, and government—must respond to in order to help define the substance of the Convention itself. At the annual International Labor Conference in Geneva, all parties come together to discuss the responses to and language of the Convention. Many complex issues and debates emerge in the process of drafting and reconciling responses. In the first round of discussions in Geneva, some core issues have already been identified.

Based on their answers to the questionnaire, most workers and advocates around the world support the elimination of measures like in-kind payments for domestic work. Because it is very difficult to monitor or regulate every meal or sleeping situation in every home, the workers felt they would prefer to receive their full salary and make their own arrangements for food and housing. In contrast, the US government’s response to the ILO questionnaire suggests that in-kind payments should be voluntary and for the benefit of the worker. Advocates believe that if in-kind payments are not abolished, they should at least be proven “voluntary” by an “opt-in” system, whereby workers explicitly agree to the terms, and employers are prohibited from taking automatic deductions. This proposed change is also reflected in the NDWA advocacy within the US Department of Labor.

VISION

A broad vision for dignified domestic work requires a new understanding of the industry, new respect for the work, and a new framework for labor rights that not only provides strong, appropriate protections in the workplace, but supports domestic worker organizing. Even in places where domestic workers have been covered by legislation, their daily experiences, as documented by organizers, show that the goal of decent work remains an ambitious one. In South Africa, which has protected and promoted the rights of domestic workers under the “Sectoral Determination Law” since 2002, workers are still experiencing widespread racism, sexism, and disrespect for the work as a profession. A conference in South Africa in May 2010 revealed the problems still facing domestic workers, which include barriers to home inspection and ineffective complaint mechanisms (Makanga 2010). In every country, relentless worker organizing and public engagement is necessary to consistently enforce existing legislation and to create the type of social transformation necessary to achieve the broad goals of equality and respect for domestic workers.

Establishing Domestic Work as “Skilled” Work

Because domestic work occurs in the “informal sector,” and is done by women, it is often regarded as a private family matter. Add to this the perception that women have the innate ability to care and nurture, and domestic work is consequently not seen as a career that requires training or education. As the world economy grows and more women enter the formal workforce, the formerly unpaid care work of women has become a commodity—a service to be purchased—but it is still not seen as a “real job.”

By addressing the growing need for care, the economic necessity of creating new jobs, and immigrant workers’ desire for real careers and a path to citizenship, lives can be improved across the economic spectrum. Creative programs for developing career

ladders, strong training programs, and quality jobs for domestic workers will benefit not only the workers but also the employing families and the economy in general. These programs would incorporate formal training as well as support for navigating immigration processes. The NDWA is in the early stages of strategizing about what such programs might entail, and how to engage the government and NGOs as potential partners.

Transforming Relationships with Employers

Many employers in the US and abroad seek to treat domestic workers as “extended family,” which is not always beneficial to the worker. Being treated as a family member can personalize the relationship between the domestic worker and the employer so as to take pressure off the employer to pay in full and on time,

to offer structured work hours, and to respect freedom of movement that allows the worker to have a life separate from the employer. In Indonesia, for example, the House of Representatives is currently discussing a “Domestic Workers Protection Bill” that would include 12 days of paid leave after one year of service, “as well as other benefits similar to those enjoyed by the formal sector.” Some employers have, however, come out against the bill, complaining that it “would effectively make domestic workers, who help do the household chores, formal workers,” adding that the bill would “undoubtedly weaken the social ties that place domestic workers [as] a part of the extended family and necessitate formal worker-employer relations.” One employer said those supporting the bill should consider the cultural and historical traditions of having domestic workers, and another said most people already had an “unwritten rule” on working arrangements with their domestic helpers (Lutfia 2010). Unfortunately, while some employers’ informal “working arrangements” are fair, there is nothing guaranteeing this, and the “cultural and historical tradition” of domestic work leaves workers with little bargaining power in this informal arrangement. While legislation is often necessary to begin transformation, what is ultimately needed is a shift in perception away from the understanding of domestic workers as family and toward recognizing them as employees with labor rights.

What makes a good employer? Many employers want to be responsible and create good jobs for the workers

they employ, but they don’t know where to start. They may have never been “bosses” before and are not sure of appropriate boundaries and expectations. A formalized, mutually agreed upon, and honored contract for work is fundamental. In addition to leave and overtime, the best contracts list the duties to be performed and those not to be performed (see Appendix C for a model contract). The contract should also describe expected working hours and termination procedures. If the worker has opted for deductions from her pay for room and board, the terms should be mutually agreed upon and fully described in the contract. For a live-in worker, it is very important that the employer provides a room with a lock, as well as access to the kitchen for the worker to prepare her own meals. In order to protect the worker and provide for her future, the employer should pay into the Social Security system, and not misclassify her as an “independent contractor.”

Regardless of whether an employer is benevolent or malevolent, an inherent imbalance of power, often intensified by differences in race/ethnicity, nationality, and class creates a situation that leaves the employer with the ability to harm or hurt the domestic worker, sometimes unknowingly. Thus, it is important for employers to look beyond minimal compliance with laws, and instead acknowledge this power imbalance and create an environment of mutual respect and dignity. Even before governments implement any changes in law, a relationship of mutual respect between the domestic worker and the employer will prevent

many of the common problems that domestic workers face on the job. This requires the employer to be educated about domestic work as career, the value that the work brings to the family, and the increased quality of care that results from a healthy and happy workplace.

A New Framework for the Labor Movement and Labor Laws

Domestic workers and farm workers, notably workers in industries most associated with slavery in the United States, as well as taxi drivers, tipped workers, guest workers, and day laborers, among others, are known collectively as “excluded workers” because of their lack of coverage by most labor laws. Unprotected because of the industries themselves or because they are made up mostly of immigrant workers with enormous barriers to asserting their rights, these workforces have started to come together and recognize their common struggles. NDWA’s collaborations with other “excluded worker” organizations like the National Day Laborer Organizing Network (NDLON) have strengthened and unified the groups who are fighting to extend labor protections to all workers, regardless of industry or status. These groups created an Excluded Workers Congress at the second US Social Forum in Detroit, Michigan in June 2010. The Social Forum provided an opportunity to convene various excluded worker organizations with the goal of developing a common vision for worker power beyond each individual industry, and to discuss excluded workers’ roles in transforming the labor movement and labor

laws in the United States in support of human rights and dignity for all workers.

Linda Oalican, a domestic worker, mother, and organizer from Damayan (a member organization of NDWA) testified at the Excluded Workers Congress:

“Our human right to dignified work is on the line and as excluded workers we do not have security or tenure at work...[E]mployers decide about workers’ hours, workload, working conditions, benefits, housing and food. Employers even decide the time when the worker can eat her meals, if and when she can go to her church or to the doctor. It is a workplace where the worker has no control; if you assert your common sense, rights, and dignity, you risk losing your job or getting deported if you are undocumented. Indeed, we are in this period of history where great changes are happening. With its vast global resources and the support of the state, global capital is unleashing its most vicious attack on the people of the world and we, the marginalized, excluded immigrant workers, are at the frontline. We have to build the widest and the strongest base to claim our right to organize. We have to fight for equal workers’ rights under the existing labor and immigration laws, and fight to create more pro-worker legislation, and challenge systemic worker exploitation in accord with our collective vision.”

Taking into account changes in the global economy, transnational migration, and shifts in production and reproduction, domestic workers offer an alternative model of organizing for low-wage workers—and the growing sector of women workers—that empowers a transformation



SOUTH AFRICAN DOMESTIC WORKERS' RIGHTS

Since the end of apartheid and the beginning of majority rule in South Africa, the government has made important strides in extending protection to domestic workers. Throughout the country, domestic workers are now guaranteed a minimum wage, basic living standards, unemployment benefits, social security, and the right to organize. Domestic workers must be given advance notice of termination and are provided one week of severance pay for each year of service. They are guaranteed four months of unpaid maternity leave and must be paid double their salary for work on Sundays or public holidays. Workers have formed the South African Domestic Workers Union, which is affiliated with the country's largest labor federation, the Congress of South African Trade Unions.

in the employer-employee relationship. By making visible the daily abuses that domestic workers face, formalizing the work relationship, and pushing for legal protections, domestic workers hope to make the work they do respected and valued. Over the past two decades, domestic workers have built a movement that transcends racial barriers,

cultural differences, national identity, and legal status, with the goal of improving the lot of some of the nation's most vulnerable workers. The multiracial, transnational, feminist nature of contemporary domestic worker organizing may help chart a new political framework for social justice advocates in the 21st century.

NEW YORK BILL OF RIGHTS

Work Hours

- Establishes 8 hours as a legal day's work
- Overtime at the rate of 1 ½ of the regular rate of pay after 40 hours for live-out domestic workers and 44 for live-in domestic workers

Day of Rest

- One day of rest in each calendar week (should try to coincide with a worker's day of worship)
- Overtime pay if a worker agrees to work on her day of rest

Paid Days Off

- After one year of employment, entitled to 3 paid days off

Workplace Protection

- Protection against workplace discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, disability, marital status, and domestic violence victim status
- Protection against sexual harassment by employer
- Protection against harassment based on gender, race, national origin, and religion
- Covers full-time and part-time domestic workers for workers compensation insurance

DOL Study

- Before 11/1/10, the Department of Labor will report to the Governor, the Assembly Speaker and the Temporary President of the Senate on the feasibility and practicality of domestic workers organizing for the purpose of collective bargaining

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CALIFORNIA DOMESTIC WORKER BILL OF RIGHTS (Proposed)

Equal overtime pay. Currently, personal attendants are excluded from overtime rights and live-in domestic workers receive less protection under overtime laws. The CDWBR would include ALL domestic workers in California's overtime protections of time and a half after 8 hours in one workday and 40 hours in one workweek and double time after 12 hours in one workday.

Equal right to a safe and healthy workplace. Domestic workers are currently excluded from protection under California's Occupational Safety & Health Act (CAL-OSHA). The CDWBR would extend CAL-OSHA protection to ALL domestic workers.

Equal right to worker's compensation. Domestic workers are removed from California's worker's compensation laws when they have worked in private households less than 52 hours or earned less than \$100 in the previous 90 days. The CDWBR would cover ALL domestic workers under California's worker's compensation laws.

Equal right to reporting time pay. Personal attendants currently have no right to reporting time pay, when they show up to work and their employer cancels the job. The CDWBR would extend reporting time pay rights that most California workers enjoy to personal attendants.

Equal right to notice before termination. Unlike California's commercial and industrial employers of 75 or more employees, domestic worker employers have no obligation to provide workers with advanced notice before terminating their services. Domestic workers are particularly vulnerable, as when terminated they often lose their job and home at the same time. The CDWBR would require at least 21 days advanced notice before termination or severance pay in lieu of notice.

Right to 5 hours uninterrupted sleep under adequate conditions. No law currently guarantees domestic workers the right to uninterrupted sleep. Domestic workers often labor around the clock, placing themselves and the people they care for at risk of sickness and unintentional mistakes caused by exhaustion. The CDWBR would guarantee domestic workers at least 5 hours of uninterrupted sleep under adequate conditions.

Right to cook one's own food. Unlike most California workers, domestic workers are often confined to the home of their employer and are forced to eat food that is unhealthy or not to their liking. The CDWBR would grant domestic workers the right to make basic decisions regarding the type of food they eat.

Right to annual cost of living wage increase. The CDWBR would provide annual cost of living increases for domestic workers who cannot collectively bargain for this modest benefit in a notoriously low-paid industry.

Right to paid vacations. The CDWBR would provide paid vacation days to domestic workers so that in addition to caring for their employers' families, they also have time to care for their own loved-ones.

Right to paid sick days. The CDWBR would provide paid sick days to domestic workers so they can recover from illness and receive medical care. This right not only benefits the domestic worker but also protects the health of employers and their family members.

MODEL CONTRACT CREATED BY DOMESTIC WORKERS UNITED

Domestic Workers United Standard Employment Contract for Domestic Workers

This contract is for full time domestic workers. This contract was made between _____
(*the employer*) and _____ (*the employee*) on _____ (*date*) and has the following
terms of employment:

1. The employee shall be employed beginning on _____ (*date*).
2. The employee shall work at employer's residence at _____ (*address*).
3. The employee is: live-in live-out (*check one*).
4. State number of children to be cared for: _____
Description of children (*age, gender, activities, etc.*) _____

5. Work Responsibilities:
Job entails the following: _____
Job does not entail the following: _____
6. The employee shall not be required to work for any person other than the employer.
7. Employer shall pay employee \$ _____ per week, not including overtime. The normal rate of pay is
\$ _____ per hour. Overtime rate of pay is \$ _____ per hour.
8. The work week shall be 40 (live-out work) or 44 (live-in work) hours.
 - In accordance with state and federal labor laws, employee shall be compensated one and a half times the normal rate of pay for every hour worked beyond 40 (live-out work) or 44 (live-in work) hours.

- Sleepovers for live-out worker shall be compensated at an additional rate of \$ _____ per day.
- Employee cannot be required to work more than _____ hours per week.

9. Employee shall receive her/his weekly wages every _____ (*day of the week*) at _____ am/pm.

10. Employer shall pay a penalty of _____ % for every day that the employee's wages are paid late.

11. Both employer and employee shall have a signed record of the payment of wages.

12. Employer shall provide a letter of reference at the end of the first year and at the end of each subsequent year of employment.

13. Domestic workers are particularly vulnerable to illness due to constant exposure to illness or toxic cleaning agents. The employer shall provide medical insurance for the employee. Alternatively, employer agrees to cover the cost of regular annual checkups and OBGYN exams, as well as the cost of emergency medical treatment when the employee is ill or injured.

14. Employer who lives on the outskirts of New York City or in suburban areas such as Westchester County, New Jersey, and Long Island shall cover the cost of transportation to and from work.

- Employer shall cover the cost of a taxi ride home when employee works past eight in the evening.

15. Upon completion of six months of employment, employee shall receive _____ weeks of paid vacation annually.

- The timing of the vacation shall be determined by the employee. The employer cannot require employee to take her/his vacation to coincide with that of the employer.
- If the contract is terminated before the employee takes her/his vacation, the employee shall be paid for the above number of weeks at the time of termination.

16. Employee shall receive, with pay, the following eight nationally observed holidays:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|
| a) New Year's Day | e) Independence Day |
| b) Martin Luther King Jr.'s Birthday | f) Thanksgiving |
| c) President's Day | g) Labor Day |
| d) Memorial Day | h) Christmas Day |

- Employee shall also receive an additional religious/cultural holiday of her/his affiliation: _____
(*e.g. Good Friday, Lunar New Year*)
- In the event that the employee agrees to work on any of these holidays, s/he will be compensated one and half times the normal rate for each hour worked.

17. Employee shall receive _____ paid sick days.
- At the end of the year, the employee shall be paid for the above number of sick days if those days were not taken. In addition, employee is entitled to _____ paid personal days.
 - At the end of the year, ~~the employee~~ shall be paid for the above number of personal days if those days were not taken.
18. Employee shall receive one month of maternity leave, of which _____ weeks shall be paid. Employment shall not be terminated under this provision if employee can resume employment after the month of maternity leave.
19. Employee is entitled to periodic breaks throughout the day, including meal breaks.
- Child care worker may take these breaks when the child(ren) is/are sleeping or otherwise safe.
20. Employer and employee agree to the following food arrangement: _____

21. Employee shall have access to employer's phones for necessary local calls during the work day.
- Live-in worker shall have free, private, and reasonable access to employer's phones.
22. Lodging (for live-in domestic workers only): Employer shall provide private, suitable and furnished accommodation for the employee free of charge, with adequate heat, ventilation, and light. Employee shall have full access to use of the kitchen and a bathroom.
23. Employer agrees to notify employee should workplace be under electronic surveillance. Surveillance shall not extend to bathrooms.
- Live-in worker's private room(s) shall not be subject to surveillance.
24. Employer and employee shall make good faith efforts to discuss and resolve any conflicts arising under this contract.
25. Either party may terminate the contract by giving three weeks' notice.
- The employer may give three weeks' pay in lieu of notice to terminate the contract.
 - After one year of employment, the employer must provide one week salary as severance pay. One additional week severance shall be paid for every year of work.
26. Employee is entitled to a raise of at least _____ % every year.

27. Any addition to the family reflects a significant change in the job description. For this reason, for each additional child, employer shall compensate employee with a raise in salary of \$ _____ per week.

28. If the employer would like the employee to travel with them, this must be mutually agreed upon and shall be compensated at an additional rate of \$ _____ per day, in addition to paying for travel and other incidental expenses related to the trip. Employee shall be provided his or her own accommodations for the trip.

29. Employer understands that workers are protected by labor laws, regardless of race, gender, immigration status or age.

Date

Signed by the Employer

Name of Employer

Signed by the Employee

Name of Employee

In the Presence of

Signed by Witness

Name of Witness

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