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Labor and Public Employees Committee
Room 3800, Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

RE: Testimony in Support of the Connecticut Domestic Workers Rights Bill

Dear Members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee,

My name is Alicia Kinsman and I am here today in support of the Connecticut Domestic Workers Rights Bill. I am an immigration attorney and manager of the legal services program at the International Institute of Connecticut, Inc., a statewide nonprofit organization dedicated to the needs of immigrants, refugees, and foreign born victims of serious crimes. Collectively, its programs aim to help low income families become self-sufficient and integrated, and include refugee resettlement, language services, job assistance, educational programming, and legal immigration assistance.

Since 2006, the Institute has assisted survivors of trafficking residing in the state of Connecticut through a federally funded aftercare program named Project Rescue. Project Rescue provides a unique array of culturally competent and trauma-informed services. These services include assistance with immigration needs, reuniting families, providing safe, confidential shelter and other basic necessities, and providing general victim advocacy with law enforcement and the criminal justice system. Additionally, Project Rescue works with partners around the state to raise awareness of human trafficking among social service agencies, law enforcement, first responders, and the general public. The program holds an appointed position with the state Trafficking in Persons Council and in 2013 received a national award by the FBI for its work in combating trafficking.

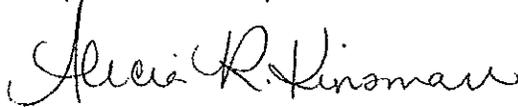
Our clients are survivors. They defy expectations. They are resilient and brave. They thrive in the face of adversity. But the number of clients we've served has increased exponentially since the beginning of our program. And many of these clients have been victims of domestic servitude. Domestic work becomes domestic servitude, a form of trafficking, when the employer uses force, fraud and/or coercion to maintain control over the worker, causing the worker to believe that he or she has no other reasonable choice but to continue working. In 2013, of the 54 trafficking survivors that Project Rescue served, 11 came from domestic servitude, 10 females and 1 male.

Victims of domestic servitude in the United States, and based on our experience, here in Connecticut, are often immigrant women. Immigrant women are particularly vulnerable to exploitation in these circumstances for a variety of reasons, including unfamiliarity with the laws, low levels of English proficiency, and fear of law enforcement. But the very nature of the job also makes domestic workers inherently susceptible to exploitation and abuse.

Domestic workers often live in the home of the employer, isolated from the public and outside of the purview of federal labor laws. They commonly work 10 to 16 hours a day for more, 6 to 7 days a week, for little to no pay.

To be clear, not all domestic workers are trafficked. But if the home remains a place where labor laws do not apply, domestic workers will continue to be exploited, with little legal protection. The institute supports a Domestic Workers Bill of Rights to change that; one that will establish labor standards and address some of the most common employment areas that put domestic workers at risk for severe exploitation, including job safety, wage and hour requirements, and protections against discrimination and sexual harassment. It will be an important step toward transforming the vulnerability of this workforce, and fighting human trafficking in our state.

On behalf of the International Institute and the individuals we serve each year, I thank you for your time and for your efforts in this matter.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Alicia R. Kinsman".

Alicia R. Kinsman
Managing Attorney