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Testimony Supporting House Bill No. 5527, An Act Concerning a Domestic Workers Bill of Rights

March 13, 2014

Senator Holder-Winfield, Representative Tercyak and distinguished members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee, my name is Isa Mujahid. I'm the field organizer for the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut and I'm here to support House Bill No. 5527, An Act Concerning a Domestic Workers Bill of Rights.

This bill proposes to remedy the historical exclusion of domestic workers from federal and state labor laws by providing these workers with the same basic protections afforded other workers under Connecticut state law. It would establish basic labor standards: overtime pay; at least one day off a week; paid vacation, holiday and sick days; and advance written notice of termination.

The ACLU of Connecticut strongly supports this legislation.

Domestic workers and farm workers are among the few categories of workers excluded from basic protections provided under national and state labor laws. The specific exclusion of domestic and farm workers is a relic of the 1930s New Deal period, when the Roosevelt administration won major reforms to protect workers' rights – but only in exchange for the exclusion of what was then primarily southern black labor (that is, farm and domestic workers) to appease segregationists. Now, some 70 years later, this legacy of the Jim Crow era persists. The denial of basic labor rights under existing law serves to perpetuate racial discrimination because 95 percent of domestic workers are people of color.

To deny domestic workers the rights and protections afforded other employees is a violation of universal human rights principles, which recognize that all persons are entitled to basic labor protections: the right to fair wages; rest and leisure; reasonable limitations on working hours; periodic holidays with pay; and security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood or other such circumstances beyond one's control.

If enacted, House Bill 5527 would abolish a legally sanctioned form of discrimination that has deprived domestic workers of the basic protections that have been afforded other workers for nearly a century. Legislation like this has become law in New York, California and Hawaii. Connecticut should be next. Please pass this legislation.