



20 Years of Advancing Justice in Our Community & Beyond

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TESTIMONY OF NATALICIA TRACY IN SUPPORT OF RAISED S.393, AN ACT CONCERNING DOMESTIC WORKERS

Good afternoon, Senator Gomes, Representative Tercyak, and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee. My name is Natalicia Tracy. I am a Sociology PhD Candidate at Boston University and the Executive Director of the Brazilian Worker Center, here in Bridgeport, Connecticut. *I speak of behalf of all Brazilian Worker Center members, of whom many are domestic workers, as I was myself for 15 years.* We also thank the more than 30 organizations that have joined us from labor, faith communities, employers, legal groups and other allies – who have endorsed and support this bill.

You have heard from other workers and I support their voices being heard, as I too was victimized because of the historic exclusion of domestic workers from key labor rights available to all other workers. Unfortunately wage theft and mistreatment of workers is rampant in this society. Many workers do not have power to stand up for their rights, and when it comes to domestic workers, they have even fewer labor protections to stand on than other workers.

Our recent survey of 127 Connecticut domestic workers active as house cleaners, personal care attendants, and nannies in 37 towns and cities in the state, sponsored by the Sociological Initiatives Foundation, has given us some very concrete data on the problems that are still prevalent in the industry here. These workers are 98% women, 83% women of color, and most often poor or low income. Almost half earn less than \$20,000 per year in family income, 71% have a family income of under \$30,000 per year, and 62% of them are providers for themselves and at least one child. This bill promises not only to strengthen the families who benefit from receiving high quality care *from* domestic workers, but also the families *of* our state's domestic workers, helping to lift these low-wage, vulnerable workers out of poverty and economic difficulty.

Our survey has revealed that over five-sixths of the workers typically have no written contract that specifies duties or hours for their work. This leaves them quite vulnerable to abuse. Lack of written contracts typically means employers are free to ask for extra hours or work tasks as needed, but fully one-third of our respondents report they are victims of wage theft, that is, they are *not paid* for the extra hours and tasks added to their duties. Over 65%, nearly two-thirds, are allowed *no breaks* during their work time. More than two out of five, 44%, also say they are never or rarely able to ask for any adjustments in their work schedules for fear of losing their jobs. More than three-fifths, moreover, report being injured on the job, but also have little recourse or protection in this area. This bill will strengthen worker protections in all these areas.

S.393 also strengthens Connecticut's provisions against trafficking of persons for labor purposes. I myself was trafficked here to the United States as a teenaged domestic worker, but unfortunately I see that even today my experience of two decades ago being frequently repeated among those who come to the Brazilian Worker Center for support. Domestic service is the one of the most common occupations that is subjected to "forced services," or trafficking. This bill provides civil remedies to address this evil, and we look forward to working with state labor authorities to help eliminate this all too common injustice.

Today is International Women's Day and an opportunity to recognize the contributions made by domestic workers – of whom most are women, and women of color, as well. On behalf of all domestic workers seeking, as I did, dignity, respect and protection from abuse, please give this bill a favorable report as soon as possible. Thank you.



Natalicia Tracy, Executive Director