



Testimony of Dina Bakst  
Domestic Workers United Policy Briefing  
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Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Dina Bakst and I am Co-Founder & Co-President of A Better Balance: The Work and Family Legal Center (ABB). ABB is a NY-based legal advocacy organization dedicated to helping workers care for their families without risking their economic security.

I am here today as a proud member of JFREJ's Employers for Justice Network. I believe deeply that domestic workers deserve the same benefits and protections as other workers ABB fights to support in the workplace. Unfortunately, the notion of the home as a workplace-- and domestic workers as deserving of basic legal protections--- is not widely accepted. As an employer of a domestic worker on the Upper West Side of Manhattan for over seven years, I know first-hand, that many families often do not see themselves as employers. Even though domestic workers often work long hours in demanding jobs, most domestic employers I know-- and I know many-- refer to their full-time child care workers informally as "babysitters." Employers are generally not familiar with current labor standards for household workers nor do they seek guidance on employment standards from public sources. Rather, if they seek guidance at all, they'll informally survey friends and neighbors, adhering to community standards rather than those set by work organizations or government.

Given the culture of privacy that surrounds employing domestic workers, most employers of domestic workers I know do not actually speak with each other about their employment practices. When my husband and I hired our incredible domestic worker over seven years ago, we knew we wanted to be fair-- but we struggled to determine what that was. We felt confused and overwhelmed. We heard of widely varying practices and "deals" that were struck. We also



knew we couldn't expect our new employee to explain our responsibilities to us. Grateful to have a steady paycheck at all, she seemed willing to accept whatever pay, benefits and job protections we offered. That certainly didn't seem fair either, as it was our responsibility as employers to educate ourselves on labor standards and adhere to them.

Without question, there is a lack of clarity around the terms of employment in the domestic worker industry. Standardized regulations would lessen the burden on employers to figure out what is appropriate and fair. It would also help encourage open communication between employers and improve our relationships with our domestic workers.

I am thrilled to welcome the new Domestic Workers Bill of Rights, which will help create standards for an ethical community and help us hold each other accountable. This law is just a first step, however, towards ensuring our most vulnerable workers have the respect and fair treatment they deserve. We need public education around the new law—and must ensure domestic workers have the right to collectively bargain to enforce their rights.

In conclusion, the Domestic Worker Bill of Rights sends a clear message that we as a society value caregiving work and must be treated with the same level of respect and fair treatment as other forms of labor. However, only by taking additional steps to ensure workers' rights, can we put into effect the value we place on caregiving—and ultimately, the value we place on our homes and our families.