



CHANGE IS POSSIBLE. CHANGE IS HAPPENING.

March 30, 2013

Testimony for Senate Committee on Workforce in support of SB 552

Dear Chair Dembrow and Committee Members,

My name is Lili Hoag and I'm the Policy Director for Family Forward Oregon. We advocate on economic security issues that impact women and families in Oregon.

Domestic workers are employed in people's homes, often caring for the most vulnerable in our society, our children and our elders. An overwhelming 95 percent of domestic workers in our country are women. They do a job – providing care for our family members - that requires complex skills and a great deal of compassion but their work is profoundly undervalued. Domestic workers do not receive some of the most basic protections provided by labor laws.

I'd like to share a little bit about the legacy of domestic workers in this country. In the United States, domestic workers were initially slaves, who were required to work in the homes of their masters under grueling conditions. Though slavery was officially abolished in 1865, a long series of political compromises were made in order to appease white employers in the South who wanted to maintain the cheap supply of domestic labor carried out by African Americans for generations.<sup>1</sup> Over 70 years later, in 1938, the Fair Labor Standards Act was passed- which created the basic labor standards most workers enjoy today- but due to a desire to continue to exploit this type of work cheaply, and in part because it has always been “women's work” and undervalued, domestic workers were specifically carved out of that legislation and continue to be excluded from many of the critical protections that state and federal law provide for today – including overtime protections, rest breaks, and much more.

Domestic workers today still suffer from a lack of protection that the majority of employees otherwise enjoy. Senate Bill 552 will help to right this historical wrong by giving domestic workers – those women caring for our kids and aging family members - some of the basic rights given to other workers in our state. To paint a clearer picture: of the 9,794<sup>2</sup> domestic workers in Oregon, the majority are hired without the safety net of a work contract, instead relying on verbal agreements with their employers. Because of the nature of the work, many employers

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<sup>1</sup> Andolan Organizing South Asian workers, CASA of Maryland, Domestic Workers United, Global Rights, University of North Carolina School of Law Human Rights Policy Clinic, Stefani Bonato, McKenna Coll, and Eric Tars. 2010. Domestic Workers' Rights in the United States: A Report Prepared for the United Nations Human Rights Committee in Response to the Second and Third Periodic Report of the United States. Washington, DC: Global Rights.

<<http://www.law.unc.edu/documents/clinicalprograms/domesticworkersreport.pdf>> (accessed March 20, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Data Center, data taken from the American Community Survey 2005-2009, provided to Family Forward Oregon by Jay Donahue on March 8, 2013.



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may not even think of themselves as such, instead seeing their domestic help as a de facto 'family member' - and they may not understand their need to provide a healthy working environment for their employee; one that allows them to get the appropriate amount of rest, to be paid overtime and that establishes a safe workplace free of intimidation or sexual harassment.<sup>3</sup> Something from which domestic workers currently have no protections.

At Family Forward Oregon, we want to change the way we, as a society, value the important and necessary care work being done by women, whether as paid work or something they provide for their own family. Care work has real economic value and should be treated as such. This is especially important when those women who work in the most intimate of settings, our homes, are unduly disadvantaged simply because they provide care. Being employed as a domestic care worker should never mean a person is not paid for their labor above and beyond a standard work week, that they are unable to get even one nights rest (in a recent national study, 25 percent of domestic workers reported that work had prevented them from getting at least five hours of uninterrupted sleep on a regular basis), or that they should have to endure threats, intimidation or sexual or physical violence simply because the law does not protect them. Although not included in SB 552, Family Forward believes that state minimum wage laws should also cover domestic workers. The value of their work is worth no less than any other workers in Oregon.

We urge you to pass Senate Bill 552 on behalf of all the women who perform undervalued care work and, specifically those who care for our most vulnerable loved ones and receive little or no protection under the law. Domestic workers should have the same rights at work that other Oregonians enjoy.

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<sup>3</sup> Appelbaum, Laura D. Why a Domestic Workers Bill of Rights?. UCLA Institute for Research on Labor and Employment. December 2010. [http://www.domesticworkers.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/ucla\\_report\\_cabor.pdf](http://www.domesticworkers.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/ucla_report_cabor.pdf)