

# Domestic Workers Bill of Rights Goes Into Effect - November 29, 2010!!

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## A New Day for Domestic Workers: Bill of Rights Goes Into Effect

**November 29, 2010**

Today, over 200,000 privately employed nannies, housekeepers, and elder caregivers in New York have gone to work so that our employers could go to theirs, just as we and those who came before us have done for centuries. We dedicate our hearts and health to providing essential care for countless families and homes. Yet for so many years, we labored in the shadows, vulnerable to all forms of abuse and exploitation. But today is not like any other day. November 29, 2010 is a new day. It marks the end of invisibility and exclusion for domestic workers, as the nation's first Domestic Workers Bill of Rights goes into effect.

The new law is justice for over 75 years of race- and gender-based discrimination. The tide is turning. After six years of organizing to pass legislation that would begin to value our vital work, we finally won recognition! For the first time, we are guaranteed basic rights and protections that most other workers have enjoyed for decades. As of today, we have the right to protection against discrimination and harassment, a minimum of one day of rest per week, and overtime pay at time and a half our regular rate. We also have a mandatory minimum of at least three paid days leave per year. Companions for the sick and elderly are now also covered under the Minimum Wage Act of New York.

The work of defending our dignity and respect has just begun – we have achieved minimum labor protections, and now we must work to make the Bill of Rights work for us! In partnership with the NY Department of Labor and Jews for Racial and Economic Justice, we are launching a mass outreach campaign to educate workers and employers alike about our rights and responsibilities, respectively.

The struggle is, of course, not over. We must build upon this victory and keep organizing to secure **fair** --not just minimum--standards in the industry. Together with the National Domestic Workers Alliance and the Urban Justice Center, we recently conducted a survey of over 500 domestic workers to assess what it takes to achieve a level of security on the job. We found that there is still high variation in the benefits received and in worker experiences negotiating with their employers. Many workers earn less while working longer hours and therefore find it hard to meet their basic needs. Benefits like

sick days, paid vacation, and personal days vary from worker to worker, and many workers report not receiving notice or severance pay when their jobs have ended. The precarious nature of this industry makes it difficult for workers to negotiate better terms and conditions. When a worker's concern is keeping her job, it's not easy for her to assert her rights or to bargain with her employer. To get these benefits for all workers, we need to negotiate collectively for better standards – united we are stronger! That's why we are working around the clock with our coalition partners to win inclusion of domestic workers in the New York State Labor Relations Act, which would give us the right to bargain collectively for benefits and fair standards at work.

The answers, as we know, are not just to be found in Albany. Starting in the new year, we will also have DWU representatives—fellow workers who have been trained on the new law and negotiations—available in key neighborhoods throughout the city. They will be first responders, making sure workers have the resources they need, when they need them, to defend and uphold their rights. These representatives will hold regular meetings, so that workers in the neighborhood can share information and learn more about their rights, and about working towards better standards in the industry.

A new era begins. Domestic workers in New York are setting bold precedents. Sister organizations in California are preparing to launch a Bill of Rights campaign in the Spring of 2011, and Massachusetts is poised to follow. Also, in June 2011, the International Labor Organization will be passing a convention on the rights of domestic workers. The NY Bill of Rights campaign and legislation have been held up as examples.

Now is the time to build real power for all workers everywhere. In our work lies the key to deep social transformation. We can help lead the way for the working people of this country to collectively reach our human potential and realize our dreams of a better future for everyone.