



Domestic Workers Ordinance (DWO) Train the Trainer Toolkit: Ordinance Quick Reference Guide

This Quick Reference Guide summarizes key rights and responsibilities under Seattle’s Domestic Workers Ordinance (DWO), a groundbreaking law that protects domestic workers and sets labor standards for individuals and households that hire them.

This document outlines core protections around wages, breaks, days of rest, and safeguards against retaliation. It is designed for community partners, hiring entities, and domestic workers to use as a simple, plain language companion to the full ordinance and official Q&A published by the Seattle Office of Labor Standards (OLS). For detailed guidance or case specific questions, contact OLS directly.

Background and significance

- The City of Seattle became the first municipality in the United States to pass a Domestic Workers Bill of Rights when the City Council unanimously adopted the Domestic Workers Ordinance in 2018.
- The law went into effect on July 1, 2019, extending fundamental labor protections to nannies, house cleaners, home care workers, and other individuals who perform paid work in private homes.
- By recognizing domestic workers as essential contributors to the city’s economy and community well-being, this ordinance set a national precedent for advancing dignity, equity, and labor standards in one of the workplaces that has been historically excluded from labor standards laws.

What type of domestic workers does the law apply to?

This law applies to people who are paid to work inside or around a private home; such as nannies, house cleaners, caregivers, gardeners, cooks, and household managers.

- **Who’s included:** People who are paid to do domestic work, whether they’re employees or independent contractors.
- **Who’s not included:** People working only occasionally (casual workers), family members of the person hiring them, and caregivers who are paid through government programs.

Who must uphold this law? This law applies to those that are considered a “hiring entity,” which is anyone who pays a domestic worker for their services. This includes individuals, households, companies, agencies, or even online platforms.

You are considered a hiring entity if you:

- Pay someone directly to do domestic work in your home
- Use an agency or business to send workers to your home
- Hire workers through an app or website
- Control how much workers are paid or how much is charged for their services
- Have the power to hire, fire, or assign workers (including promoting or removing them from a platform)
- Hire a subcontractor to do the work on your behalf



Even if you don't think of yourself as an "employer," the law may still consider you responsible if you have any control over the work or payment.

Understanding protections under the ordinance

Below is a summary of the key provisions of the law, written in plain language to help workers, families, and community partners better understand rights and obligations under the DWO.

Paying the Right Wage

- Domestic workers must be paid at least Seattle's minimum hourly wage. For work in 2025, this is \$20.76 per hour.
 - This rate will change annually on January 1st when the minimum wage is recalculated.
- You cannot pay less than the minimum wage, even if the worker is an independent contractor.
- If you deduct anything from a worker's pay (like for meals or housing), it must be clearly written, voluntary, and for the worker's benefit.

Meals and Breaks

- Domestic workers must receive:
 - One uninterrupted, paid 10-minute rest break for every 4 hours worked.
 - One 30-minute meal period if they work more than 5 hours. This meal break can be unpaid only if they are completely off-duty and not required to stay on-site.
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- If you interrupt or skip a break, you must pay extra:
 - +10 minutes of pay for a missed rest break
 - +30 minutes of pay for a missed meal break

A Day of Rest for Live-In Workers

- Live-in workers must get one full 24-hour day off after working six days in a row.
- The day off must be truly off-duty; they cannot be required to stay at the work site or be on-call.
- This day of rest can be waived only if the worker agrees voluntarily and in writing (in the language they're most comfortable with).

Privacy Protections

Domestic workers have the right to keep their personal documents and belongings. . A hiring entity cannot keep or hold on to a worker's passport, visa, work permit, money, or any other personal items.

All Workers Are Protected Under the Law

All domestic workers in Seattle are protected by the law, no matter your immigration status. You have the right to be paid the minimum wage, take breaks, and work in safe conditions, even if you are undocumented. The City of Seattle will not ask about your immigration status if you report a problem or file a complaint. You can speak to us without fearing that your immigration status will be a factor in receiving help. These rights belong to you, and the law is here to protect you.



Why Sharing a Notice of Rights Matters

- Even though it's not required by law, giving domestic workers a copy of the Model Notice of Rights is a helpful way to make sure everyone is on the same page.
- The notice is available in multiple languages on the Seattle Office of Labor Standards (OLS) website.
- It explains a worker's rights, pay details, and what to expect on the job.
- Sharing this notice builds trust, improves communication, and can help protect both the worker and the hiring entity if questions or concerns come up later.

What Counts as Interference

- Hiring someone to work in your home comes with responsibilities and interfering with a worker's rights can be against the law. You may be in violation if you interrupt their breaks, assign so much work that they can't reasonably take a break, discourage them from asking questions about their rights, or expect them to accept less than Seattle's minimum wage.
- Even if you're working through an agency or an app, asking them to change a worker's pay or schedule in a way that takes away their legal rights can still make you responsible.

It's illegal to retaliate against a domestic worker for standing up for their rights. This means you can't punish, fire, threaten, or treat a worker unfairly because they asked about their rights, took a break or day of rest, filed a complaint, or participated in an investigation. Protecting these rights helps create a fair and respectful workplace for everyone.

Support and Guidance From OLS

If you have questions or need help understanding your rights or responsibilities, you can contact the Seattle Office of Labor Standards (OLS). They offer support to both domestic workers and hiring entities. You can call, email, or fill out an online form whatever works best for you.

- If you're a worker, you can contact the Office of Labor Standards (OLS). Your name and personal information will be kept private and confidential during an investigation unless it's absolutely necessary to share and even then, OLS will let you know first. You have the right to ask questions, report concerns, and get support without putting yourself at risk.
- If you're a hiring entity, reaching out to OLS to ask questions will not trigger an investigation. The team that answers your calls and emails is separate from the enforcement team. Their goal is to help you understand the rules and support you in following the law, not to penalize you for asking.

How to Contact OLS

Website: www.seattle.gov/laborstandards

Phone: 206-256-5297

Workers (email): workers.laborstandards@seattle.gov

Hiring Entities (email): business.laborstandards@seattle.gov

Online Forms: Workers can fill out the employee inquiry form at laborinquiry.seattle.gov/employee-inquiry.

Hiring entities can use the employer inquiry form at laborinquiry.seattle.gov/employer-inquiry.