



Seattle Domestic Workers Standards Board

May 4, 2020

Governor Jay Inslee
Office of the Governor
PO Box 40002
Olympia, WA 98504-0002

Dear Governor Inslee,

As members of Seattle's Domestic Worker Standards Board, we are calling on Governor Jay Inslee and members of the Washington State legislature to immediately address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on domestic workers.

We are a group of domestic workers and domestic employers who serve the City of Seattle in its effort to ensure fair labor standards for workers such as gardeners, home health care aides, house cleaners, and nannies.

As you know, domestic workers carry much of the economy, enabling others to work outside the home and caring for those who, due to age or illness, need support in their homes.

Due to loopholes in state and federal law, many domestic workers are paid well below minimum wage, work more hours than they are paid for, do not receive benefits such as paid sick leave and health care, and are extremely vulnerable to physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, and economic abuse.

Additionally, domestic workers are disproportionately immigrants and people of color who are excluded from other sectors. These workers are not guaranteed by law a workplace free from discrimination. Every vulnerability described above is exacerbated by the systems of oppression that already impact them, especially for members of communities who are already disenfranchised by the state. The impact of this pandemic on domestic workers and their families cannot be overstated.

Many domestic workers were already living job-to-job when the economy shut down. In Seattle, we were just beginning to address this existing crisis through our work to implement the Domestic Workers Ordinance when the pandemic hit. In many family units, the domestic worker is the primary earner. Their loss of income impacts their extended families and communities.

While we support your current "Stay Home, Stay Safe" mandate for public safety, we do not support the decision to implement it without also creating a safety net for domestic workers, including undocumented workers. Here are the actions needed at the state level to protect domestic workers:



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1. **Moratorium on housing payments for the duration of this crisis.** We join members of the Seattle and Bellingham City Councils in calling on you to enact a moratorium on rent, mortgage payments, insurance payments, and property taxes without any fees, debts, or penalties, including controls on rent increases once the moratorium ends. This action is needed in order to give low-wage workers some degree of psychological safety and ensure we do not face an exacerbation of the existing homelessness crisis when the evictions moratorium lifts.
2. **Emergency mental health assistance for low-income communities.** Mental health is a crucial component of public health, and the mental health impact of this crisis is already being felt among domestic workers, particularly those from communities that are the hardest hit by COVID-19. For many, this comes on top of existing trauma and the protracted stress of surviving on less than minimum wage. We urge you to immediately fund more community-based mental health services for low-wage workers impacted by this crisis and their families.

We recognize that marginalized communities are underrepresented among mental health providers, making it difficult to find treatment providers who can work effectively in the most-impacted communities. We know that long-term investments are needed to ensure that all Washingtonians have access to trained mental health providers from their own communities who can provide culturally appropriate mental health treatment. We also know that creative solutions are available now.

3. **Assistance to access unemployment.** Many domestic workers do have a social security number and should qualify for expanded assistance under the CARES Act. However, the process for independent contractors to apply for unemployment is convoluted and difficult, even for people with existing familiarity with the process. This is an even greater challenge for those who do not have fluency in English or access to the Internet. As a result, many will not be able to successfully complete the application. We know that the Washington State Employment Security Department does not have the capacity to manage the demand for direct assistance to applicants. This must be mitigated through grant funding for peer support services to guide people through this process.
4. **Immediate access to financial resources for undocumented workers.** The State of Washington should establish a special relief fund for undocumented residents who have been excluded from state assistance prior to this crisis and remain excluded from Congress' response. Washington's economy has long depended on the invisible labor of undocumented workers who now face even more extreme hardship. We join more than 430 other organizations and many more individual Washingtonians in calling on you to create a Washington Worker Relief Fund that provides economic assistance to undocumented Washingtonians, and to create a permanent system that gives undocumented workers access to unemployment insurance.



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Our economy depends on domestic work and the people who do it. We call on you to use your emergency powers to protect them and all of us as we pull through this crisis together.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dana Barnett".

Dana Barnett, co-chair

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Silvia Gonzalez".

Silvia Gonzalez, co-chair

Cc: Washington State Legislature Seattle Delegation
Commissioner Suzi LeVine, Employment Security Department
Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan
Seattle City Council