

[HOME](#) [ABOUT US](#) [EVENTS](#) [MAGAZINE](#) [STORE](#) [BLOG](#) [DONATE](#) [MUSIC](#)

Search this site:

Search

Time to Bargain, Say New York's Domestic Workers

JENNY BROWN | OCTOBER 28, 2010

Domestic workers are specifically denied bargaining rights under New York state's labor law, but childcare givers, housekeepers, and elder care workers gathered today in downtown Manhattan to begin a campaign to change that.

Domestic Workers United, which has 4,000 members in the New York City area, scored a pioneering victory when the governor signed a Domestic Workers' Bill of Rights into law August 31.

The law, which will go into effect at the end of November, provides the approximately 200,000 domestic workers in New York state with protections that most workers take for granted, including overtime pay after 40 hours, workers compensation insurance, and a guaranteed day off each week.

"We're finally getting the recognition and respect we deserve," said Brontie Scott, a nanny and DWU member. "But we have a really long way to go."

Most domestic workers are the only employee in their workplace, and they usually have no formal work agreement with their employers, making traditional collective bargaining a difficult proposition.

DWU released a report on prospects for bargaining among domestic workers today, backed up by a survey of 500 domestic workers detailing their working conditions. It lands four days ahead of a deadline for a study on the same questions to be released by the state.

DWU's report revealed long hours, low pay, lack of sick leave, and instability of employment, all of which the workers say make a strong case for collective bargaining rights. Domestic workers have no recourse if they are fired for concerted activity.

Scott cited her experience of broken promises and docked pay by employers who "misled and lied" to her. She described being fired with 15 minutes' notice and being promised vacation only to have her employer "forget" their verbal agreement.

"It's like you are captive and have no control over your own life," Scott said.

Working alone in their employers' homes means that domestic workers suffer "isolation, informality, and invisibility," said DWU's Priscilla Gonzalez.

Gonzalez said they want to be included in the law "to be able to try out different models of coming together as a bargaining unit." They are particularly looking at organizing by neighborhood.

DWU is asking the state's Public Employee Relations Board, which also handles private sector labor issues, to designate which bargaining units are appropriate, "whether on the basis of geography, type of domestic labor, or other criteria."

It's unclear what the state is likely to recommend.

Historically, domestic workers were excluded from federal labor law in a 1930s deal with Southern senators who wouldn't vote for the National Labor Relations Act unless farm workers and domestic workers—at that time mostly African American—were left out. The New York law mirrors the national law in that it also excludes farm workers.

The DWU report, done in cooperation with the Urban Justice Center, is called "Domestic Workers and Collective Bargaining: A Proposal for the Immediate Inclusion of Domestic Workers in the New York State Labor Relations Act." It's available [here \(in PDF form\)](#).

Join the discussion!

[Login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

[Login or register to post comments](#)

[Print this](#)

[Send to friend](#)

[Share this story](#)

[RSS](#)

[Make text larger or smaller](#)



Video: Are Public Sector Workers Overpaid?

JANE SLAUGHTER | OCTOBER 27, 2010

Video: Who Gives More, Business or Labor?

MARK BRENNER | OCTOBER 26, 2010

Learning the Art of Flexible Labor

DAN DIMAGGIO | OCTOBER 25, 2010

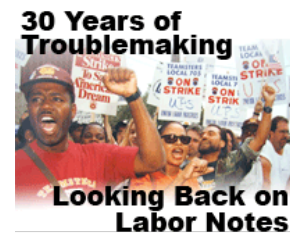
[more](#)

Sign Up

Email:

Go

Get our regular email updates.



Connect:



Related stories

[Domestic Workers in New York Win First-Ever Job Protections](#)
[Left Out of Labor Law Protections, Excluded Workers Want In—And More](#)
[Social Forum Immigration Activists Back Action on Arizona Law](#)
[Senate Gridlock Cripples NLRB](#)
[Domestic Workers Make History In New York](#)
[Should Nonmajority Unions Have Right to Bargain?](#)

[Magazine](#) | [Archives](#) | [Conferences](#) | [Solidarity Network](#) | [Troublemakers Handbook](#) | [Store](#) | [Contact](#) | [About](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Donate](#) | [Internships and Jobs](#)
Main Office: 7435 Michigan Ave Detroit, MI 48210; (313) 842-6262. **East Coast Office:** 104 Montgomery St., Brooklyn, NY 11225; (718) 284-4144.
Labor Education and Research Project © 2005-2010.