The struggle of domestic work is to be recognized as “real work.” Its historical roots in slavery, its association with women’s unpaid household labor, its largely immigrant and women of color workforce, and exclusion from legal protections devalue their work. Historically, African slaves, indentured servants, or hired maids performed housework. After the abolition of slavery, the paid domestic workforce became predominantly Black women until the Civil Rights movement opened doors to other occupations. Since the 1970s, a growing workforce of immigrant women of color seeking to escape poverty created by U.S.-driven neoliberal policies abroad occupies the industry. Survey results found 99% of domestic workers in New York are foreign-born. Race and gender-based legal exclusions by the U.S. and New York state governments have shaped the domestic work industry in New York. Domestic workers have been written out of major federal and state laws that protect workers. Ninety-five percent of domestic workers in New York are people of color, and 93% are women.

### History of Domestic Work in the U.S.

**1450-1860:** African slave trade provides labor that builds colonial economy.

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OSHA regulations explicitly exclude domestic workers from the Act’s protections “as a matter of policy.” Civil Rights Laws: Title VII bars employment discrimination on the basis of “race, color, religion, sex, or national origin,” but applies only to employers with 15 or more employees. Thus, virtually every domestic worker in the U.S. is de facto excluded from Title VII’s protections.

Under New York State Law, while domestic workers who do not live in their employer’s home are entitled to overtime at a rate and a half times their regular rate after 40 hours of work in a week, live-in domestic workers receive no overtime. The NLRB has ruled that if a domestic worker leaves a half hour before the minimum wage then she is only entitled to overtime after 44 hours of work in a week.

### History of Exclusion

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Workers who face abuse identify race and immigration status as factors for significant periods of their lives. They are a stable workforce; yet domestic workers lack basic labor and health protections and often, face exploitive work conditions. Sixty seven percent of workers work more than 50-60 hours a week. The wage breakdowns are modeled after Restaurant Opportunities Center of New York report. Minimum wage, although increased to $6.75 in NYC, is shown here as $5.15 since surveys were conducted before the wage increase.

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We have a dream that one day, all work will be valued equally.

Domestic Workers United

Executive Summary

New York City is a leading force in the global economy, but it couldn’t be without the 200,000 domestic workers who sustain the city’s families and homes. Domestic workers enable New Yorkers to work and have leisure time knowing that their children, elderly, and homes are taken care of. Domestic workers are the employers that are meeting the demanding demands required for the smooth functioning and productivity of the professional sectors. Domestic work forms the invisible backbone of New York City’s economy.

This groundbreaking report shines a spotlight on the hidden workforce of New York City’s economy. For too long, worker exploitation, verbal or physical abuse, has been a fact of life for domestic workers. Domestic work forms the invisible backbone of New York City’s economy.

Survey results clearly point to the need for industry standards that will cover New York’s famed high cost of living. Domestic workers lack basic labor and health protections and often, face exploitive work conditions.

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Domestic workers stay, in the industry, often with the same employer, for significant periods of their lives. They are a stable workforce; yet endure working conditions that violate their rights as workers and as human beings.

- Half of the workers earn low wages. An additional 26% make wages below the poverty line or below minimum wage. Half of workers work overtime—often more than 50-60 hours a week. Social workers, (27%) of workers work beyond regular raises and pay for overtime hours worked. Domestic workers are primary providers of their families in the U.S. and in their home countries, but face severe financial hardships.

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- Forty-six percent of domestic workers experience financial hardships.

Survey results clearly point to the need for industry standards that will ensure fair labor practices, recognition, and human treatment. The report proposes a set of long-term policy recommendations to create an industry that is fair, equitable, and dignified.

The data presented in this report are based on results of a survey of 547 domestic workers conducted by Members of Domestic Workers United between 2005-2004. 14 worker testimonies and 7 employer interviews. Domestic workers played a significant role in the design and analysis throughout this industry investigation. Workers were surveyed at meetings, social gatherings, in playgrounds and parks, on the subway and commuter trains, and various other locations. Employer interviews were collected through employer and worker networks and through outreach in parks and playgrounds and were conducted by Joan For Racial and Economic Justice and the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University.

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Creating Change

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It is only fair that those that care for our homes and loved ones are given the same respect and dignity for the work they perform.

In addition, employers show they are unclear about their legal and ethical responsibilities and are in need of industry standards. In 2003, New York City Council passed the Nanny Bill, which requires employment agencies to provide domestics with a "code of conduct" that explains labor laws and to inform workers of their rights. It is a good beginning. But in an informal industry based in private homes, domestic workers require a comprehensive solution that guarantees their rights to fair working conditions and recognizes their work. The Domestic Workers’ Bill of Rights is a New York State legislative proposal which addresses the long-standing, unfair exclusion of domestic workers from labor protections, and the unique conditions and demands of the industry in which they work by amending the New York State Labor Law to ensure workers:

- Receive a livable wage and are paid for overtime;
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Women’s Worth – Domestic Workers Struggle for Dignity
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Under New York State Law, while domestic workers who do not live in their employer’s home are entitled to overtime at a rate of $15 an hour and a half times their regular rate after 40 hours of work in a week, live-in domestic workers who labor inside their employer’s home are entitled to only a half-time minimum wage and then only after 44 hours of work in a week.

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### HOME IS WHERE THE WORK IS: Inside New York’s Domestic Work Industry

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY DOMESTIC WORKERS UNITED & DATACENTER**

- **Valuing Domestic Work**
- **History of Exclusion**
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This groundbreaking report shines a spotlight on the hidden workforce that goes largely unmonitored – until now. Domestic workers live in the very homes of our city’s business leaders, serving as housekeepers, elderly companions, cleaners, babysitters, baby nurses and cooks. These domestic workers are a stable workforce; yet they are a hidden workforce. They are a workforce in need of liability and health protections and often, face exploitive work conditions.

Survey results show that immigrant women of color make up nearly the entire domestic workforce. The wages domestic workers earn cannot go without the 200,000 domestic workers who sustain the city’s families and homes. Domestic workers are primary providers for their families and the U.S. and in their home countries, but face severe financial hardships.

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