

National Domestic Workers Alliance  
1203 K Street NW  
Washington, DC 20005

House Ways and Means Committee  
1102 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

June 10, 2020

Dear Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit these written comments for the record of the Ways and Means Committee hearing “The Disproportionate Impact of COVID-19 on Communities of Color,” held on May 27, 2020. We applaud the Ways and Means Committee’s effort to put a spotlight on the undeniable fact that the coronavirus pandemic is exposing the longstanding and persistent structural inequities in our society and economy. The virus is killing Black and Latinx people at disproportionately higher rates than white people<sup>1</sup> and women of color are hit particularly hard by unemployment due to the pandemic.<sup>2</sup>

The National Domestic Workers Alliance represents 2.2 million domestic workers - the hard-working house cleaners, nannies and homecare workers who provide essential care, support and services to millions of families across the U.S. every day. Domestic workers are overwhelmingly women of color and are disproportionately immigrants. According to the Economic Policy Institute, in 2019 over 57% of domestic workers were black, Hispanic, or Asian American/Pacific Islander women.<sup>3</sup>

Domestic work is rooted in our nation’s history of slavery, segregation, structural racism, and legal exclusion. In the 1930s domestic workers were intentionally excluded from the bedrock workplace protections of the Fair Labor Standards Act and the National Labor Relations Act in order to win the necessary votes from southern lawmakers to ensure the bills’ passage. That long history continues to

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<sup>1</sup> Scott, D. (2020)/ Vox, Covid-19’s devastating toll on black and Latino Americans, in one chart, <https://www.vox.com/2020/4/17/21225610/us-coronavirus-death-rates-blacks-latinos-whites>.

<sup>2</sup> Hegewisch, A. Phil, M. Zohal, B. Hayes, J. (2020). Institute for Women’s Policy Research, Dramatic Decline in Employment Hits Women Even More Severely than Men, <https://iwpr.org/publications/dramatic-decline-in-employment-hits-women-even-more-severely-than-men/>.

<sup>3</sup> Wolfe, J., Kandra, J, & Shierholz, H. (2020). Economic Policy Institute, Domestic workers chartbook, <https://www.epi.org/publication/domestic-workers-chartbook-a-comprehensive-look-at-the-demographics-wages-benefits-and-poverty-rates-of-the-professionals-who-care-for-our-family-members-and-clean-our-homes/>.

shape the sector today, where caregiving is devalued as not real work and workers are still excluded from key workplace protections and do not have the respect and dignity they deserve. Even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, domestic workers were paid very low wages, had no job security and no safety net. With an average wage of \$12.01/hour, domestic workers are three times as likely to be living in poverty as other workers, and almost three times as likely to either be in poverty or be above the poverty line but still without sufficient income to make ends meet.<sup>4</sup> Fewer than one in 10 domestic workers are covered by an employer-provided retirement plan and just one in five receives health insurance coverage through their job.<sup>5</sup>

COVID-19 has exacerbated the existing vulnerabilities of domestic workers as well as other low-wage workers of color and women workers of color. Women of color in general, and Black women specifically, are at the center of the coronavirus pandemic. They are overrepresented among essential workers, like domestic workers, who are not able to work from home and must risk their safety daily to provide essential services. Of those going to work during the pandemic, most are doing so without protective equipment and are still working for wages that make it incredibly difficult to support their families.

COVID-19 is further forcing domestic workers to face the impossible choice of paying rent, putting food on the table or risking their families' health. It is no accident that domestic workers have been among the first to lose income, and are among the last to receive support, during this pandemic. Hundreds of thousands of domestic workers have been intentionally excluded from key provisions of federal relief packages because of their immigration status or because they work in the informal economy. According to data collected via La Alianza - a national media venture for Spanish speaking domestic workers - most domestic workers surveyed (86%) said they have not applied for unemployment insurance, the majority of them (54%) because they are ineligible. Only 22% of respondents reported that they received the \$1,200 stimulus check.<sup>6</sup>

Additional data from these same surveys paint a picture of how COVID-19 has led to widespread economic devastation and health insecurity among domestic workers. These results were collected between March 27-30, with 12,153 respondents, and between April 3-6, with 16,617 respondents:

- Half of surveyed domestic workers reported lack of access to medical care, putting them at greater risk should they or their family contract COVID-19.
- Although 87% of respondents affirmed they need a mask to be protected, only 18% had

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<sup>4</sup> Wolfe, J., Kandra, J., & Shierholz, H. (2020). Economic Policy Institute, Domestic workers chartbook, <https://www.epi.org/publication/domestic-workers-chartbook-a-comprehensive-look-at-the-demographics-wages-benefits-and-poverty-rates-of-the-professionals-who-care-for-our-family-members-and-clean-our-homes/>.

<sup>5</sup> Wolfe, J., Kandra, J., & Shierholz, H. (2020). Economic Policy Institute, Domestic workers chartbook, <https://www.epi.org/publication/domestic-workers-chartbook-a-comprehensive-look-at-the-demographics-wages-benefits-and-poverty-rates-of-the-professionals-who-care-for-our-family-members-and-clean-our-homes/>.

<sup>6</sup> NDWA weekly survey of Spanish-speaking domestic workers on the impact of Coronavirus. This data is from a survey sent on 5/1 and was responded to by over 10,000 domestic workers.

regular access to one.<sup>7</sup>

- 94% of surveyed respondents reported employer-and client-initiated coronavirus-related cancellations. Of those respondents, 70% reported that they don't know if they will have the same job back after the pandemic.<sup>8</sup>
- 77% of respondents are primary breadwinners. 84% of workers reported they either will not be able to afford food for the weeks of April 6-19 or are uncertain if they will be able. 55% of respondents were unable to pay April's rent.<sup>9</sup>

In the face of such a devastating toll of the pandemic on all working families and especially on communities of color, we call on Congress to swiftly and decisively pass meaningful relief that prioritizes low-wage workers including domestic workers.

Specifically, domestic workers need:

- **Strong protections for all frontline workers**
  - Pandemic premium pay for all essential workers
  - Protective equipment and health and safety information for workers who need to go to work
  - Assistance with childcare and other care responsibilities
  - The creation of a stand alone grant program that provides funding to non-profit organizations to provide health and safety information and equipment and know your rights information
  - The allocation of funding to cities and states to build an infrastructure to deliver portable benefits so that frontline gig workers are able to better access paid time off and other workplace benefits
- **Financial security**
  - Ongoing cash payments that include immigrant families
  - Eviction suspension and increased rental assistance that includes immigrant working families
- **Health**
  - Free COVID testing, treatment, including a vaccine once it is available, for the uninsured, regardless of immigration status.
- **Suspension of all immigration enforcement - everyone who needs care must be able to seek it safely.**

As we are still in the midst of a global pandemic, our nation is once again confronted with police killing of Black men and women and the deeply entrenched structural racism in all arenas of our lives. The devastating impact of COVID on Black communities and other communities of color is an example of that entrenched structural racism in our country. Our policymakers have the responsibility to invest in

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<sup>7</sup> NDWA weekly survey of Spanish-speaking domestic workers on the impact of Coronavirus, [https://domesticworkers.org/sites/default/files/Coronavirus\\_Report\\_4\\_8\\_20.pdf](https://domesticworkers.org/sites/default/files/Coronavirus_Report_4_8_20.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> NDWA weekly survey of Spanish-speaking domestic workers on the impact of Coronavirus, [https://domesticworkers.org/sites/default/files/Coronavirus\\_Report\\_4\\_8\\_20.pdf](https://domesticworkers.org/sites/default/files/Coronavirus_Report_4_8_20.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> NDWA weekly survey of Spanish-speaking domestic workers on the impact of Coronavirus, [https://domesticworkers.org/sites/default/files/Coronavirus\\_Report\\_4\\_8\\_20.pdf](https://domesticworkers.org/sites/default/files/Coronavirus_Report_4_8_20.pdf)

working families, especially those families who have been hit the hardest by the pandemic, to ensure that all Americans have the real chance at achieving economic security and full economic opportunity.

We applaud the Committee's efforts to draw attention to this important issue and thank you for the opportunity to submit our statement.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Haeyoung Yoon". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Haeyoung Yoon  
Senior Policy Director, National Domestic Workers Alliance