

Written Testimony

Dana Barnett, Hand in Hand

Labor Protections Subcommittee of the Congressional Committee on Education and Labor

Thank you to Chairwoman Adams, Ranking Member Keller, and members of the Workforce Protections Subcommittee for inviting me to speak today.

My name is Dana Barnett and I live in Seattle Washington with my husband and our 8-year-old son. I have been a volunteer member of the Seattle Domestic Workers Standards Board and currently work for Hand in Hand: The Domestic Employers Network, which is a national organization that engages people who employ domestic workers in creating equitable working relationships. I am here today to provide testimony in support of creating rights and protections for our country's domestic workforce - nannies, house cleaners and home care workers - through a National Domestic Workers Bill of Rights.

My husband, Dan, and I moved to Seattle from Philadelphia 10 years ago for his job at the University of Washington. A couple of years after we moved, we were overjoyed to welcome our child. Being new to Seattle, however, we did not have a local support network of family and friends, and we felt overwhelmed juggling childcare and returning to work outside the home. So, when my maternity leave ended, we decided to hire a nanny to care for our newborn.

Our nanny took amazing care of our 3-month-old, and made us feel that he was safe and in good hands. Initially it was challenging because we had never employed someone in our home. I later found a sample work contract from the organization I now work with, Hand in Hand. The contract provided guidance on wages, benefits, working conditions, and other employer responsibilities. In the stress of transitioning from being with my new baby full time to going back to working outside the home, it was so helpful to have clear guidelines and expectations for managing his care with our nanny.

Later, we hired a house cleaner to come to our home once a month. Having our house professionally cleaned helped us to balance our work and parenting schedules and bring more order to our household. Our son was touched by the care that she took in assembling his stuffed animals on his freshly made bed. Once again, we used the resources from Hand in Hand to create clear agreements as well as to understand local labor laws.

Seattle was the first city to pass a municipal law, the Domestic Workers Ordinance, creating protections for domestic workers. The Ordinance created a Domestic Workers Standard Board, which is a community advisory body of domestic workers and employers. The board partners with Seattle Office of Labor Standards to ensure enforcement of the Ordinance and expand protections for this workforce.

In 2019, I had the honor of being appointed to the standards board where I served as the co-chair for two years alongside Silvia Gonzalez, an extraordinary domestic worker leader. The

board held focus groups and conducted surveys with workers and employers in Seattle to collect further community input. We conducted outreach and education to inform the community about the law, and we made additional policy recommendations based on the input that we gathered. One recommendation is to provide domestic workers access to paid time off, a right that, as COVID has shown, is key to public health. The board also provided feedback to the city about how to implement and enforce the Ordinance. Last year, the City Council approved a budget to implement our recommendations.

The Domestic Worker Standards Board is one way that a disparate industry can come together to discuss challenges and opportunities. In Seattle, our outreach, implementation support, and recommendations to the City Council and the Mayor's Office have provided much needed clarity for employers and workers. A national standards board is part of the Domestic Worker Bill of Rights, and would ensure that employers aren't struggling to find information and resources, and employees understand their rights at work.

The Ordinance is making a difference for domestic workers. Just this past month, a live-in domestic worker won a settlement of over \$71,000 because her household employer had not paid the minimum wage and overtime mandated by law. It is critical that bad actors in all industries face consequences. But the Ordinance is not just about providing accountability for bad actors. The employers I speak with every day want to know their responsibilities and how to comply with them. They are relieved to know that employees in domestic work situations have worker protections.

The Ordinance is also making a difference for employers. In addition to my work on the Standards Board, I now work as an organizer with Hand in Hand, where I do education and outreach to domestic employers in Seattle. I hear time and time again from employers that the law is beneficial to them by creating clear guidance on how to manage a worker in their home. It leads to better care, better quality of work, and less stress for everyone involved—worker and employer.

The pandemic brought into sharper relief what we've always known - that care is essential and that domestic workers are essential workers. Domestic work takes place in our homes, our most intimate space. These are the workers who are taking care of our children, our elders, ourselves. Why wouldn't we want to ensure that we take care of the people who are taking care of us? Everyone benefits when workers have rights.

Bio

Dana Barnett is the Seattle / Washington Organizer for Hand in Hand: The Domestic Employers Network. Prior to joining Hand in Hand, Dana worked for over two decades as a mediator and trainer, both on staff of organizations like the Washington State Bar Association and the Mediation Center of Dutchess County, and as a consultant with community groups, schools, and nonprofit organizations. Dana became involved with domestic worker rights in 2019 and served as a member of the Seattle Domestic worker standards board where she was the co-chair. Dana is currently a member of the Washington State Labor & Industry Domestic Workers Workgroup on workers' compensation. She has a Master's degree in Social Justice Educational Studies from State University of New York New Paltz.