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NATIONAL DOMESTIC
WORKERS ALLIANCE

45 Broadway, Suite 320
New York, NY 10006
646. 350. 5806
CARINGACROSS.ORG
DOMESTICWORKERS.ORG

March 24, 2021

Testimony from Ai-jen Poo, co-founder and executive director of the National Domestic Workers Alliance and director of Caring Across Generations

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Chairwoman Maloney, Ranking Member Comer, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for holding this hearing, and for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the National Domestic Workers Alliance and Caring Across Generations. Happy Women's History Month and thank you for passage of the American Rescue Plan. Because of your leadership, women who are struggling to survive, have a real chance for recovery.

Equal Pay Day was created to shine a light on gender pay inequity. Women make about 82 cents for every dollar earned by white men for the same work. For women of color, those numbers drop even lower: 63 cents for Black women, 60 cents for Native women, and 55 cents for Latinas. Asian and Pacific Islander women are paid 85 cents for every dollar, and within this group, there are more disparities. Vietnamese women earn 67 cents, Hmong women earn 61 cents, and Burmese women earn only 52 cents.

For domestic workers, equal pay is not only about equal pay for equal work, it is also about equal valuing of the work that women do in the economy at large. Caregiving and cleaning is work that has always been assigned to women, and taken for granted that women will do. As a profession, it has always been associated with Black women, women of color, and immigrant women. Domestic workers are 92% women, and more than half women of color. **This work epitomizes essential work.** It enables millions to participate in the workforce knowing their homes and families are safe. Despite what domestic workers make possible for all of us, it's shockingly undervalued. The average annual income of a home care worker is approximately \$17,000 per year, and 82% of domestic workers don't have a single paid sick day.

The pandemic has deepened inequity for women who were already struggling. In March 2020, over [52% of domestic workers surveyed had no work](#). A week later, that number increased to 68%. On a call with our members, one woman held up her phone to the camera to show us that she only had one cent left in her bank account. Like millions of domestic workers, she was faced with the impossible choice of keeping herself and her family safe, and putting food on the table. Susie Rivera, a home care worker in Texas for over 40 years, has continued working as an essential worker through the pandemic, without sick days, paying out of pocket for her own



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PPE and safe transportation to reach her clients, and to support her family, earning a wage of \$11 per hour.

But the care crisis for women is bigger than domestic work. According to the National Women's Law Center, women's overall participation in the workforce has dropped to 57% -- the lowest level since 1988. Nearly 3 million women have left the workforce since the pandemic began, and a leading driver is an increase in caregiving responsibilities in the home and [the inability to find affordable and reliable family care](#).

As our child care centers and schools closed, our nursing homes became vectors, and all of us socially distanced, we realized that we had no foundation or infrastructure to support our ability to care for our families, but for the invisible care work that women did, and could no longer do in the same way. Especially for women essential workers in minimum wage jobs - from restaurant workers to grocery workers - **too many women simply don't earn enough to make ends meet or to make care work.**

From the boardroom to the classroom, gender inequity in the workplace fundamentally rests also on how we value, or fail to value caregiving and care workers.

This Congress has a profound moment of opportunity to rebuild and reset our economy to be more fundamentally more equitable. The only way to achieve fair pay for care workers is for members of Congress to decide it's a priority. As we look toward a jobs and recovery plan, we must - invest in caregiving the way we invest in infrastructure -- the care workforce and child care, paid leave and home and community based care services that will enable women and everyone else to have the ability to return to work.

Thank you and I look forward to your questions.