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TESTIMONY TO THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE, SUBMITTED REGARDING

Act Concerning Wage Education and Enforcement Relating to Domestic Workers

Good evening, Honorable Members of the Appropriations Committee:

I speak as the Executive Director of the Brazilian Worker Center in Massachusetts and co-director of the Connecticut Worker Center in Bridgeport. I am also a professor of Labor Studies at the University of Massachusetts. I have been working in Connecticut since 2012 organizing around labor laws, legislative campaigns, workers' rights, and immigrant rights. I was also myself a domestic worker for 15 years.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak tonight, to advocate for resources for the state's Department of Labor, and community partners, to enforce the good labor laws that have been thoughtfully and recently put on the books in Connecticut. Domestic workers have been historically an "invisible" group of workers often working in private and out-of-view spaces, and in an industry our society has a long history of not recognizing as "real work." This is why regrettably they were excluded from the protections of America's foundational labor legislation of the 1930s, including the **National Labor Relations** and the **Fair Labor Standards Acts**. We are still working to correct that unfortunate and unjust omission today!

The hard-to-reach nature of these workers – most often **women of color, immigrants, low-income, many speaking other languages, often heads of households as single mothers** – requires responsive community organizations like ours to spend concerted energy to collaborate

with state labor authorities to organize, educate, advocate, and work with these women of color to support their assertion of their rights to respect, dignity, and fair pay as workers. This is another one of the many glaring racial disparities demanding correction that the Covid-19 pandemic has brought to light.

Connecticut is home to over 40,000 domestic workers – a complex group who include many PCA’s, companions, caretakers, nannies, housecleaners – some in unions, and some paid through public funds, but mostly unorganized and privately-employed.

Despite the guarantees, many still experience underpayment of wages for their duties – **that is, wage theft** - because of lack of clear regulation, enforcement, or public understanding of Connecticut’s good laws against wage theft. Even though it has been estimated that Connecticut’s low-wage workers suffer annually \$ 6.5 million dollars in stolen wages,¹ wage theft overall continues to be a serious **national problem** – estimated by the Economic Policy Institute to cost workers up to **\$15 billion** dollars a year (that’s almost as much as all other property theft combined!). Connecticut is not the only place where better education and enforcement about our laws needs to take place, but we need to do our part.

So, I’m here today to ask for your support in passing the ***Act Concerning Wage Education and Enforcement Relating to Domestic Workers***, that will give both Connecticut DOL and community partners the resources to work in collaboration to provide education and fair enforcement of our current state labor laws.

Thank you very much.

¹ Unidad Latina en Acción and New Haven Workers Association, *The Connecticut Wage Theft Crisis: Stories and Solutions*, 2015