

Appropriations Committee – Public Hearing

February 19, 2021

Testimony of Nelli Jara

PLEASE SUPPORT

**AN ACT CONCERNING DOMESTIC WORKERS WAGE EDUCATION AND
ENFORCEMENT BILL**

Good afternoon, Honorable Members of the Appropriations Committee. I am here today to speak in support of An Act Concerning Domestic Workers Wage Education and Enforcement Bill.

My name is Nelli Jara. A Connecticut resident, and a mother of two children Sebastian and Christina who are attending high school and college, respectively. I am originally from Ecuador, where I was a social worker who worked with families in crisis. I have lived in the U.S. for over 24 years, and my first job was a live-in housekeeping position with a family. Five months after I started working for this couple, I learned that I had cancer. It was very hard for me because my job didn't provide any benefits such as health insurance or paid sick time. I was hired through an agency that kept my first week of pay and I didn't have a contract or any job security.

I was very lucky to work for such a wonderful family who provided me with a private doctor and cared for me, treated with me respect and dignity, and paid me fairly. After that job, my next one involved taking care of American children, where I ended up staying overnight with them, and feeling like I was part of the family. Then I worked for nine years for a couple in which I was a caregiver, social worker, therapist, nurse, homemaker, driver, tailor, and psychologist. And, of course, all was done with lots of love and care. During the whole time working for 19 years providing love and care to many families and caring for my own family as well (including my two children), I also found myself having many surgeries, totaling 10, in order to fight my cancer. Even though I was blessed with good employers, and I took great care of them, and I gave everything with my heart, but I have to say that I never had any benefits or job security.

For several years now, I have been a community organizer in Fairfield County trying to support domestic workers' gaining better employment rights, to learn self-advocacy and civic engagement, and of course during this past year, everyone got hit very hard with Covid, and of course we have provided a great deal of emergency assistance. At the Connecticut Worker Center, workers come and ask us to help them to get in touch with their past employers, since they are still owed wages.

Because of their immigration status, and the fact they often don't speak English, they often don't feel comfortable going to the Department of Labor. We have tried to help them, but it's been hard.

We are here today because it's really important for our community to ensure that the Department of Labor has adequate resources to support ALL workers, and to be able to have the capacity to work with communities like ours, and organizations like us. We want to be able to refer our community members to them for protection under laws we have all agreed to enact here in our state. If we have laws, shouldn't they be enforced, after all? We try to help workers, but we do not have the capacity to do it alone. We truly need the backup and support of the Department of Labor to assist in carrying out this responsibility for all of us in Connecticut.

We have to remember that behind every worker there is a family to be fed, dreams to make true and goals to be accomplished. For people who work in homes across CT providing high quality service and care for families, children and seniors, we especially need these protections.

Thank you for supporting this bill,

Nelli Jara