



OPENING STATEMENT

House Committee on Education and Labor

Chairman Robert C. "Bobby" Scott

Opening Statement of Chair Adams (NC-12)

Subcommittee on Workforce Protections

Essential but Undervalued: Examining Workplace Protections for Domestic Workers

Thursday, July 28, 2022 | 10:15 a.m.

Today, we are meeting to examine the important role domestic workers play in our nation's households and economy as well as our responsibility to better meet their needs.

As the daughter of a domestic worker, I am proud to serve as Chair for this hearing.

Across the country, domestic workers are the professionals who care for our children, support our older or disabled family members, and care for our homes.

Most of these workers serve as home care aides and direct support professionals, helping older and disabled Americans with daily tasks, including preparing meals, managing medications, and providing transportation. No matter who they support, domestic workers' services are incredibly valuable—not only to those who receive them, but also to the family caregivers who would otherwise spend their time on this important work.

In other words, domestic workers allow Americans to live with dignity and independence and make it possible for family caretakers to contribute to their communities.

Although domestic work is vital to the everyday lives of countless Americans, federal labor laws do not sufficiently protect domestic workers. In fact, employment protections for domestic workers were explicitly carved out of our foundational labor and employment law in the 1930s—the result of racist efforts to exclude industries in which Black workers were concentrated. To this day, domestic workers—who remain overwhelmingly women of color—are denied collective bargaining rights, safety and hazard protections, and protections against discrimination, harassment, or retaliation.

The lack of basic protections—and the historic segregation of women of color in employment—has created a severe wealth gap for domestic workers and left them vulnerable to abuse and discrimination.

For example, on average, domestic workers earn just over \$12 per hour, compared to a median wage of nearly \$20 for other workers. Even worse, reports have found high rates of wage theft against domestic workers. As a result, 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.

Tragically, we know domestic workers are also vulnerable to sexual harassment, sexual abuse, and other forms of physical violence.

Simply put, our nation relies on domestic workers to care for our children, families, and homes without giving them the basic resources to care for themselves and their families.

This injustice doesn't just hurt domestic workers—it also directly affects those who rely on them, particularly as the demand for domestic workers rapidly increases.

Over the next decade, domestic worker occupations are expected to increase more than three times faster than other occupations. According to the Service Employees International Union, the country will require 4.7 million domestic workers by 2028. Yet, in 2019, there were only roughly 2.2 million domestic workers.

If we want to meet this expected demand and successfully recruit and retain domestic workers to address this care deficit, and if we believe these professionals deserve fair pay and decent working conditions, then we must give greater attention to legislative solutions.

To that end, Representative Jayapal's *Domestic Workers Bill of Rights Act* would take critical steps to support these invaluable workers. I applaud Representative Jayapal's leadership and her longstanding commitment to fighting for our domestic workforce—and I am glad to be a cosponsor on this important legislation. As we will hear today, Representative Jayapal's legislation would finally extend basic workplace protections to domestic workers and strengthen the means to enforce those protections.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses and working with my colleagues on improving the lives of domestic workers and ensuring that our loved ones can access the care they need.