

New York City Expands Protections for Domestic Workers After Long-time Exclusion

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On August 25th, 2021, Mayor Bill de Blasio signed legislation adding domestic workers to [New York City's Human Rights Law](#), which offers laborers protection from discrimination based on age, race, and gender and enacts penalties against employers found to be violating the law. The new law now provides domestic workers protections from harassment when it comes to processes of hiring and firing and gives domestic workers the right to seek redress under The City Human Rights Law like other employees in New York City.

The law, known as Intro 339B, protects the estimated 328,000 domestic workers in New York City (NYC) who include nannies, caregivers, cleaners, and home-health aides.

"I feel like dancing," said Kenya Williams after hearing that the bill had become law. "I experienced racism." Williams, a domestic worker, has helped nannies who have faced disability issues and racism. "We are entitled to be treated like humans. It's sad we need a bill to say that," Williams said.

Currently, advocates, domestic workers, and allies work towards a "Care Campaign" for NYC. The campaign bridges together the care community to transform the domestic work industry in the City into one that is fairer. The campaign hopes to achieve this through impacting mayoral decisions around domestic work. Williams believes passing the bill is only the first step., "The care campaign is important because we have to maintain it [the bill]. Employers need to be made aware of the bill and it needs to reach the public", says Williams.

Domestic workers are often subject to discrimination and abuse due to their position as precarious employees in the private sphere. Domestic workers in the United States are often vulnerable to forced labor and human trafficking, abuse from employers, and workplace discrimination.

The National Domestic Workers Alliance estimates that 94 percent% of NYC's domestic workers are women, and a substantial majority are immigrants and minorities, many of whom are also undocumented. Domestic work is a multibillion-dollar transnational industry, yet domestic workers are largely low-wage, with 23.4 percent% of domestic workers living below the poverty line nationally. According to the [American Independent](#), [The Polaris Project](#), and [Voice of America \(VOA\)](#), domestic workers have endured even greater risks to their safety and health during the pandemic.

Yolande Arthur has been a nanny in New York for 15 years. “When I first started working, I faced discrimination in the workplace. My son was sick. I needed time off to care for him. The woman employing me said she would have to employ someone else,” says Arthur.

Under the new law, this would be illegal.

Arthur contends that while the bill is a necessary step, employers’ attitudes need to change to create better conditions for domestic workers. “They [employers] feel like they can do whatever they like,” Arthur says.

Nicol Huger, another NYC nanny, says employers often ask domestic workers to accompany them on vacation but deduct the nanny’s vacation time from that. Further, she says that domestic workers like herself are vastly underpaid by exploitative employers in general.

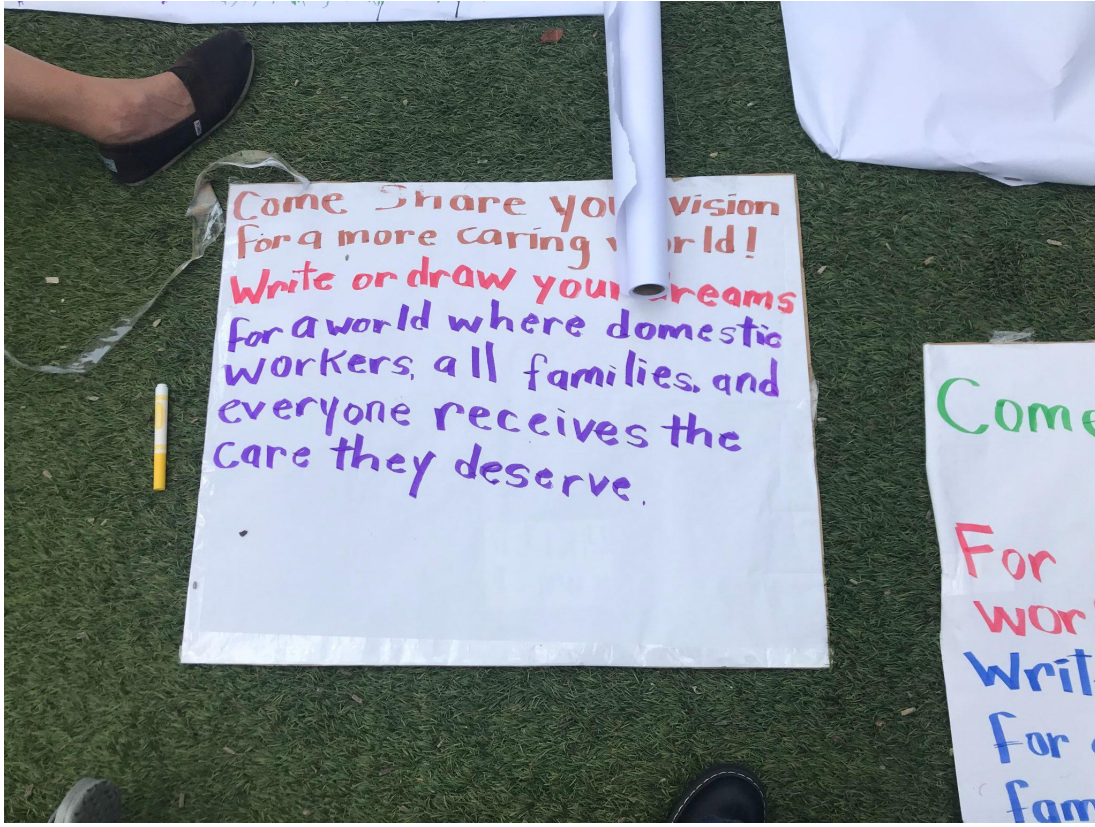
“Some employers also only want to pay 20 dollars before taxes and many bosses don’t even give severance,” Huger adds.

“I am taking care of the most precious thing in your life, but you don’t want to pay,” says Huger.

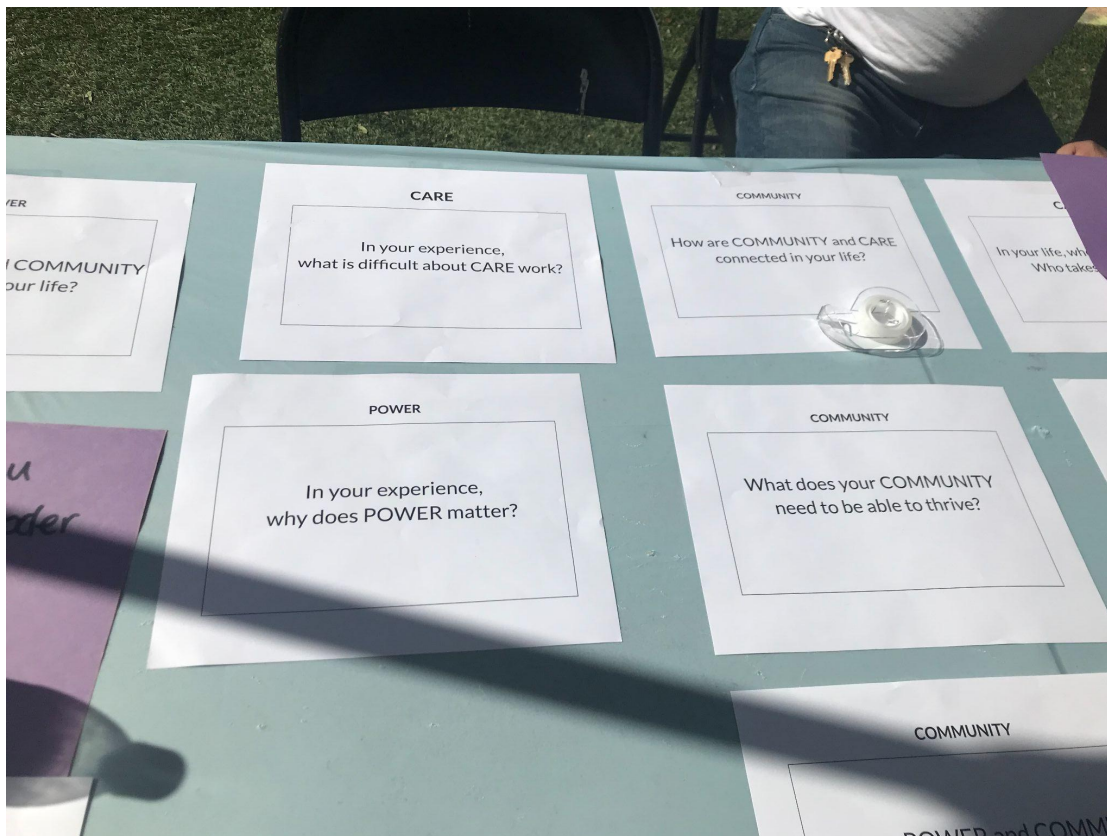
Tatiana Bejar is NYC’s lead organizer for Hand in Hand: The Domestic Employers Network, a group that started in 2010 representing domestic employers and their allies working with domestic workers to support the passage of the New York State Domestic Worker’s Bill of Rights. They were also part of the campaign leading Intro 339B.

Bejar says she is excited about the bill being implemented. However, she foresees challenges in enacting the bill. “It will be a challenge figuring out how to reach out to high numbers of employers and employees and engaging employers. There will be employers who still don’t know about the law and continue to discriminate against domestic workers,” Bejar says.

“Employers need to use their privilege and power to provide dignified working conditions for domestic workers,” she adds..



Pictured Left from Right: Nannies Nicol Huber and Yolande Arthur at a 'Care Forward' event held by various domestic work organizations in Brooklyn.



Cards set up at a 'Care Forward' event illustrating the "Care Campaign of NYC"

Sources:

Kenya Williams
domestic worker for 24 years
Phone number: 7183603524
Email: w.kenya20@yahoo.com

Yolande Arthur
athuryolanda@gmail.com
3478634621
Nanny for 15 years

Nicol Huger:
Nanny
3475816577
nicolhuger86@gmail.com

Tatiana Bejar
Hand in Hand: The Domestic Employer network
Lead organizer in NY
tatiana@domesticemployers.org

Websites:

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<https://domesticemployers.org/>

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