FLORIDA POLICY INSTITUTE

Undervalued Yet Indispensable: Florida's Domestic Workforce

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Executive Summary

Florida's domestic workers, a vital part of the state's essential workforce who care for and provide in-home cleaning services to families, children, seniors, and people with disabilities, faced numerous barriers to fiscal stability even before the pandemic hit. These roadblocks — exacerbated by COVID-19 and the subsequent economic recession — include meager wages, unsafe and unstable working conditions, and lack of state and federal protections afforded other working people.

Florida Policy Institute (FPI) took a deeper look into this essential workforce and found the following:

- **55.3 percent of domestic workers are immigrants, while just 26 percent of other working Floridians are**. Almost a third (30 percent) of domestic workers are undocumented, or lacking legal status to remain in the country.
- **94 percent are women, while just 47 percent of other working Floridians are.** This is on par with the national average.
- **Latina/o and Black Floridians are overrepresented in the domestic workforce**. They account for 42.8 and 23.7 percent of domestic workers, respectively; however, Latina/o workers comprise 27.2 percent of Florida's overall workforce, while Black Floridians comprise 14.8 percent.
- **Miami is home to the greatest share of the state's domestic workforce.** There are 56,000 domestic workers in the Miami-area, which is 48.1 percent of the state's domestic workforce.
- **Latina/o and immigrant Floridians comprise a markedly higher share of domestic workers in the Miami-metro area.** While 43 percent of Florida's domestic workers are Latina/o, 62 percent of Miami-area domestic workers are. Strikingly, 84 percent of the Miami MSA's domestic workers are immigrants, compared to 55 percent of state domestic workers who are.
- **Domestic workers are paid 40 percent less than the median wage of all other workers.** Domestic workers in Florida are paid a median wage of $12.19/hour, compared to the median wage of $19.20 for other workers.

To counter this historical discrimination, Florida's Congressional Delegation should support the National Domestic Workers Bill of Rights, which was re-introduced on July 29, 2021.[1] This measure would ensure that more than 115,000 working Floridians (and domestic workers nationwide):

- receive written contracts of scheduled hours and time off, including breaks, overtime, and sick days;
- are protected against harassment and discrimination;
- receive sufficient termination notice (for live-in workers) and pay for client-canceled last-minute shifts;
- can collectively bargain for improved wages and workplace conditions;
- have access to a new National Domestic Worker Hotline and workforce training; and
- receive increased access to retirement and health care benefits.

Importantly, the measure would protect all employees, whether undocumented or not. Alternatively, Florida policymakers could model the national legislation to create a statewide Domestic Workers Bill of Rights, as 10 other states have done over the past decade.[2]

Introduction

The Floridians who care for children and those with disabilities, keep homes tidy, and look after aging loved ones are needed now more than ever. Over 115,000 domestic workers provide these services in private homes throughout the state, as nannies, child care providers, home care aides, and house cleaners. In less than a decade, it is expected that care workers will comprise the largest share of workers in the nation as the Baby Boomer generation increasingly requires assistance to age at home.[3] In Florida, where adults over age 65 comprise the second-highest share of residents anywhere else in the country (over 21 percent of residents), this reality can no longer be ignored.[4]

Yet the care crisis has already arrived for domestic workers. As FPI and numerous others have highlighted,[5] because domestic work occurs in private households outside of public view, these workers' struggles and identities are often overlooked. This was true before the COVID-19 pandemic but has become even more obvious since.[6] Long taken for granted as so-called "unskilled" laborers, domestic workers are met with low pay, limited to nonexistent benefits, and vulnerability to a range of abuse, wage theft, and labor trafficking. As a result, the turnover rate for this profession hovers above 65 percent.[7]

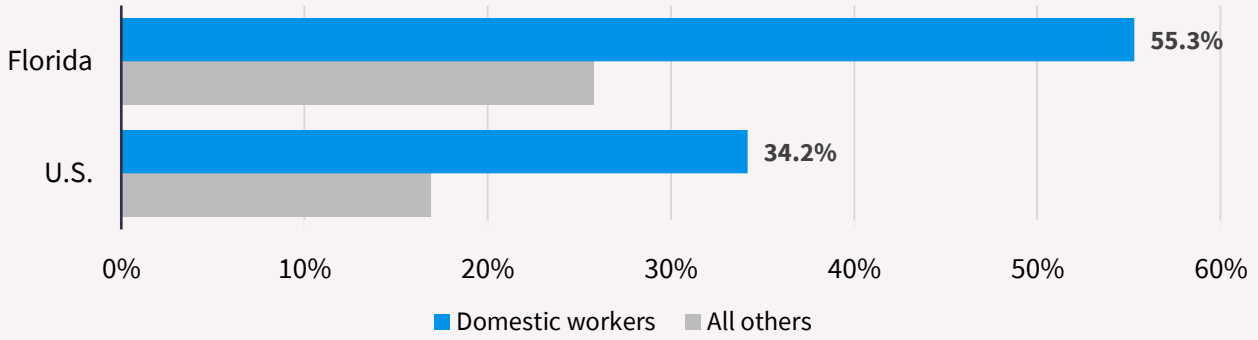
This report uses six charts to help shed light on Florida's domestic workforce. Collectively, these visualizations demonstrate that women, immigrants, and Black and Latina/o Floridians disproportionately take on this work and earn well below a living wage, especially in South Florida.

1. More than half of Florida's domestic workers are immigrants.

Immigrants are overrepresented among domestic workers nationwide, but in Florida this is especially pronounced, with 55 percent being born outside the United States. By contrast, just 26 percent of other working Floridians are immigrants. (See *Figure 1.*) Thus, even though Florida has a higher number of immigrants than most states, these proportions show that immigrants remain overrepresented in this work.

Figure 1. IMMIGRANTS ARE OVERREPRESENTED IN DOMESTIC WORK, ESPECIALLY IN FLORIDA

Compared with other work, statewide and nationally



Source: Economic Policy Institute (EPI) analysis of U.S. Census Bureau's 2015-19 American Community Survey data.

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Moreover, almost a third (30 percent) of Florida's domestic workers are immigrants who are not U.S. citizens, which includes (but is not limited to) those who are undocumented. Research shows that undocumented domestic workers are more likely to face low wages, wage theft, and abuse on the job than their documented peers. Given their non-legal status, they also have few options to redress these concerns.[8]

Immigrant domestic workers also suffered disproportionately during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Just as other working people lost their jobs, so too did droves of domestic workers, who were given little to no notice and no assurance of paid time off or related benefits. An estimated 25 percent of Spanish-speaking domestic workers across the country remain unemployed, compared to just 9 percent before the pandemic.[9]

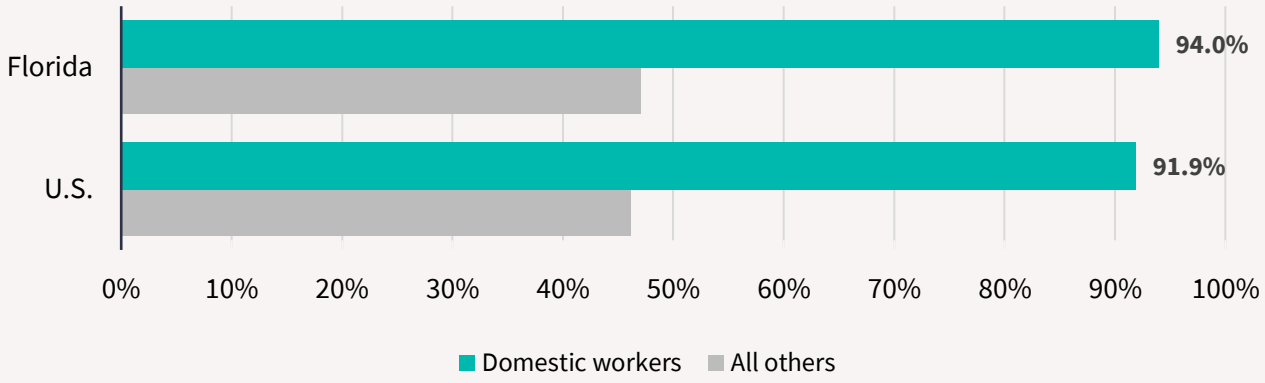
Unemployed immigrants who are undocumented or living with an undocumented family member (mixed-status households) were doubly disadvantaged, as many were left out of federal COVID-19 relief.[10] On the other hand, those domestic workers who continued working faced significant health and safety risks on the job, given that the field is unbound by most federal workplace safety laws.[11]

2. Domestic workers are overwhelmingly women.

Statewide, 94 percent of domestic workers are women, while just 47 percent of other working Floridians are. This proportion is on par with the national outlook. (See *Figure 2.*) Women being overrepresented in domestic service is largely a reflection of gender norms dating back to the 19th century that stigmatized housework and child care as "women's work."

Figure 2. MORE THAN 9 IN 10 DOMESTIC WORKERS ARE WOMEN

Share of workers who are women, statewide and nationally



Source: EPI analysis of U.S. Census Bureau's 2015-19 American Community Survey data.

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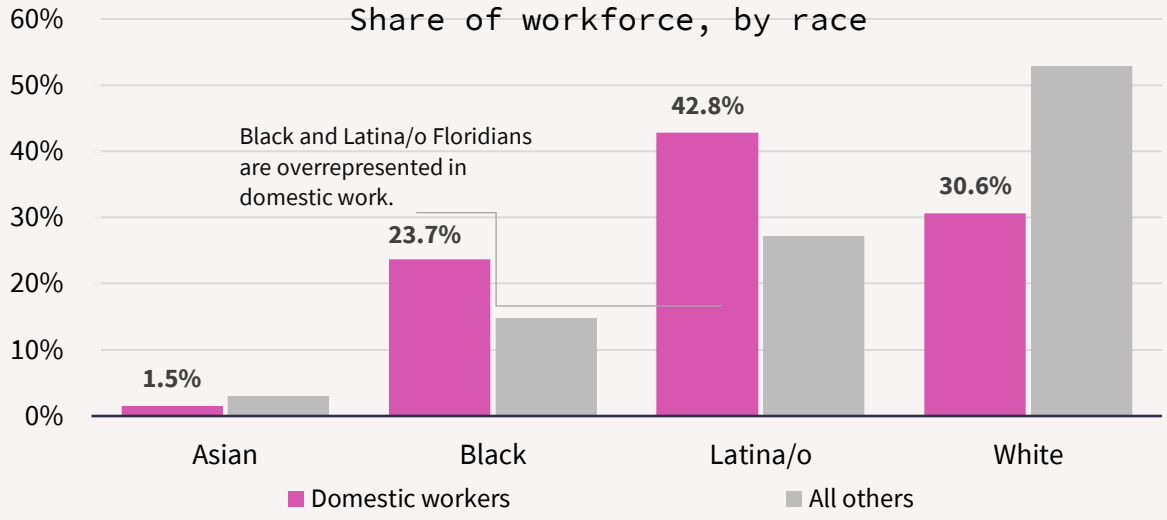
Before the Industrial Revolution, men and women conducted a much more even share of domestic duties. However, once work outside the home — including office work — became more common for men, women found themselves doing most of the child-rearing, cooking, and cleaning. This is where the rise in professional domestic work took off in earnest, as middle-income women hired other women to do housework they no longer wanted to do.[12]

The COVID-19 pandemic illuminated how pervasive these gender norms are. When the nation went into quarantine and businesses — including child and home care providers — scaled back or closed their doors, women overwhelmingly resumed the brunt of household labor, many doing so while still trying to hold down part- and full-time jobs. A December 2020 survey of working Floridians found that 73 percent of mothers faced child care issues that affected their ability to work during the pandemic, while less than half of fathers echoed the same concerns.[13] As a result, women's labor force participation in Florida stands at its second-lowest rate in 34 years.[14] This trend negatively impacted domestic workers as their agencies shuttered and many private clients abruptly fired them, no longer needing or able to afford their services.[15]

3. Most domestic workers are Latina/o and Black.

As *Figure 3* illustrates, 43 percent of Florida's domestic workers are Latina/o, while Latina/o workers comprise only 27 percent of the remaining state workforce. Latina/o Floridians are especially likely to work as nannies and maids. Black Floridians are also overrepresented in domestic work, with 24 percent in the field compared to just 15 percent of the rest of the state workforce. They are most likely to work as home care aides, who may provide personal or home health care, depending on their qualifications. Personal care aides assist people with activities of daily living, including getting dressed, walking, bathing, and preparing meals. Home health aides may also provide personal care but are additionally qualified to provide health care services, including administering medication and caring for wounds.[16]

Figure 3. LATINA/O AND BLACK FLORIDIANS ARE OVERREPRESENTED IN THE DOMESTIC WORKFORCE



Source: EPI analysis of U.S. Census Bureau's 2015-19 American Community Survey data.

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The complex intersection of race, gender, and immigration status explains why people of color — especially women and immigrants — are more likely to work in domestic service than their peers. While women of color were always a major part of domestic work, the field was once much more diverse. Prior to the end of the Civil War, nearly half of U.S.-born white women were employed in domestic work. By 1920, less than 10 percent still were.[17]

As the Industrial Revolution leveraged new opportunities for white women (both U.S.- and foreign-born), they began to look down upon and distance themselves from domestic work. Meanwhile, the share of Black women in domestic work — lacking similar opportunities and stamped by society as

"ideal domestic servants"— quickly surpassed other women's stake in the field.[18] At the same time, Latinas, especially in the Southwest, began entering the domestic workforce in increasing numbers.[19] By the time the Roosevelt Administration enacted the National Labor Relations Act and Fair Labor Standards Act of 1935 and 1938, respectively, the racialized nature of domestic work was cemented. As a result, while millions of Americans were bestowed protections like a minimum wage, the ability to unionize, and overtime, domestic workers were left out.[20] Some gains have been made by advocates since, including securing domestic workers' right to the minimum wage, but they are still excluded from far too many labor protections.

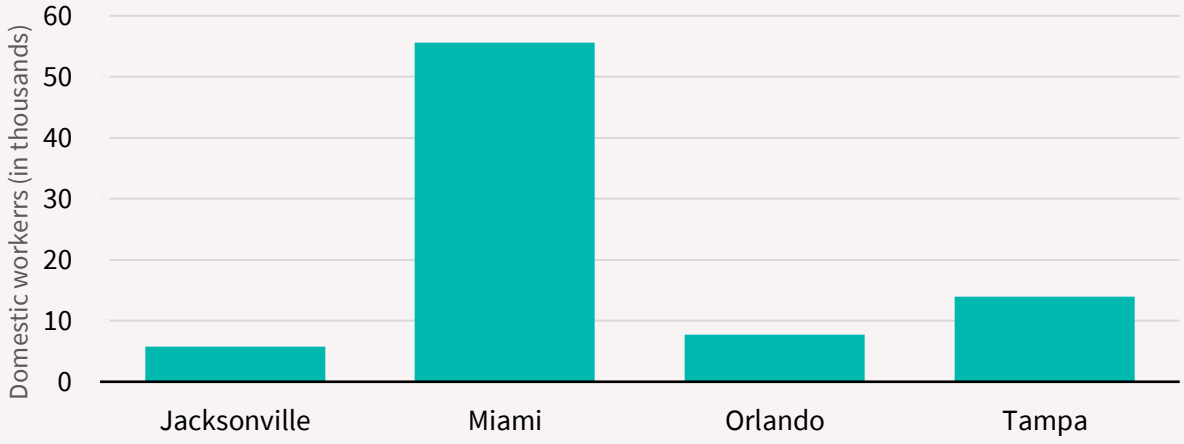
Since the 1960s, further denigration of domestic work meant that immigrant-born Black and Latina women became much more prominent in domestic work than their U.S.-born peers of color.[21] This trend endured and is reflected heavily in Florida's current domestic workforce.

4. Domestic work is especially prominent in South Florida.

Statewide, there are an estimated 115,400 Floridians working in domestic service. This ranks Florida fourth among states in number of domestic workers.[22] Nearly three-quarters (83,200) of these Floridians live and work within four metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs), as designated by the U.S. Census Bureau: Miami-Ft. Lauderdale-West Palm Beach, Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater, Orlando-Kissimmee-Sanford, and Jacksonville. The Miami-area is home to the highest share of Florida domestic workers, with nearly 56,000 employed (48.1 percent of the state domestic workforce). The

Figure 4. NEARLY HALF OF FLORIDA'S DOMESTIC WORKERS LIVE IN MIAMI

Number of domestic workers by metropolitan statistical area (MSA)



Source: EPI analysis of U.S. Census Bureau's 2015-19 American Community Survey data.

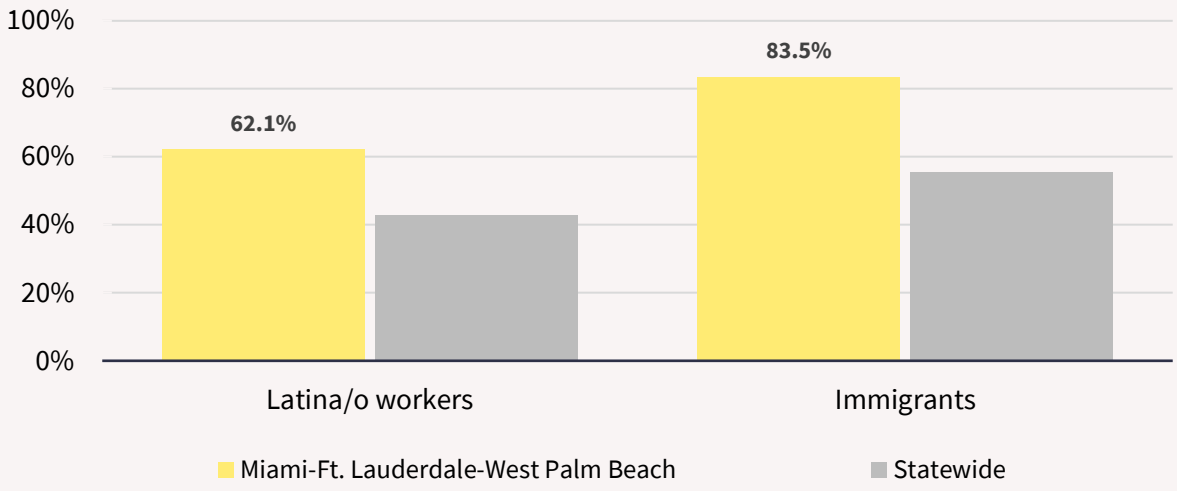
Tampa, Orlando, and Jacksonville MSAs have the next highest shares, home to 12.1, 6.7, and 5 percent of the domestic workforce, respectively (see *Figure 4* for number of workers by metro area).

5. Latina/o and immigrant Floridians comprise a markedly higher share of domestic workers in the Miami-metro area.

Notably, the previously described inequities between domestic work and other professions are even more pronounced in the Miami-metro area. Whereas 94 percent of the state's domestic workers are women, 96 percent of Miami-area domestic workers are. By a small margin, the share of Black domestic workers is higher in the Miami MSA (25 percent) than Black Floridians' share in the rest of the state domestic workforce (24 percent). While 43 percent of Florida's domestic workers are Latina/o, 62 percent of Miami-area domestic workers are. Strikingly, 84 percent of the Miami MSA's

Figure 5. LATINA/O AND IMMIGRANT DOMESTIC WORKERS ARE OVERCONCENTRATED IN SOUTH FLORIDA

Miami MSA relative to Florida



Source: EPI analysis of U.S. Census Bureau's 2015-19 American Community Survey data.

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domestic workers are immigrants, compared to 55 percent of state domestic workers who are (see *Figure 5*).

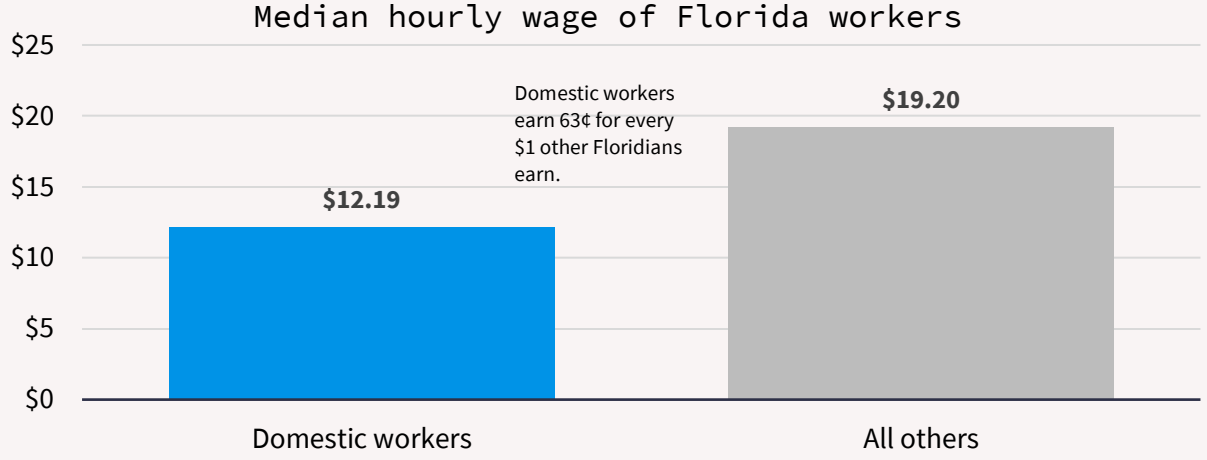
These disparities cannot be written off as a natural outcome of South Florida's markedly high immigrant and Latina/o population, as both demographic groups' share in domestic work remains much higher than their share in the broader Miami-area workforce. This further underscores that domestic work is driven by women, immigrants, and people of color.

6. The median hourly pay of Floridians in domestic work is $12.19.

It is important to put this wage data into context. In Florida, the only way that $12.19 constitutes a living wage is if there are two adults in the household working full-time with no children. For a single parent, a single person without children, or any individual or couple with more than one child throughout the state, $12.19 falls well below a living wage. [23]

By comparison, the rest of Florida's workforce earns a median wage of $19.20, almost 40 percent more than domestic workers earn (see *Figure 6*). This remains true even when education level and demographic factors (e.g., age, race, immigration status) are accounted for. Moreover, those in domestic service are often unable to secure consistent, full-time hours despite the desire to. Lower hourly pay coupled with this involuntary part-time status means on the whole domestic workers also earn significantly less annually than the rest of the workforce.[24]

Figure 6. FLORIDA'S DOMESTIC WORKERS ARE PAID 40 PERCENT LESS THAN FLORIDA'S MEDIAN WAGE



Source: EPI analysis of U.S. Census Bureau's 2015-19 Current Population Survey data. Dollars adjusted for inflation, based on 2020 figures.

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Florida's minimum wage increase to $15 by 2026 will reduce pay disparities for Floridians of color and women,[25] but the exact number of domestic workers to benefit cannot be easily quantified (see *Methodological notes*). Those already earning at or above the $12.19 median wage will not benefit from Florida's increase until at least 2024, when it reaches $13 per hour. Even among those who stand to benefit from the wage jump to $10 per hour this year will only move marginally closer to a living wage.

Economic conditions may be especially dire for domestic workers in South Florida, as the cost of living is much higher than in the rest of the state. For example, a living wage for one adult working full-time to support themselves with no children is $16.08 in Miami-Dade County, compared to $14.82 statewide.[26] Yet the median wage of Miami-metro domestic workers sits slightly below the state median, at $12.09 per hour. The number of non-U.S. citizens in domestic work is also higher, at 45 percent of Miami-area domestic workers compared to 30 percent of the state's domestic workers. As previously mentioned, for those non-U.S. citizens who are undocumented, the likelihood of wage theft, employer retaliation, and inability to access public benefits is much greater. All these factors may negatively impact Florida domestic workers' economic stability.

Policy Recommendation: Pass a Domestic Workers Bill of Rights

Advocates and experts alike have been calling for the elevation of domestic work for decades. Given the emotional and physical toll their work can take, combined with the low pay, limited benefits, and added hardships that their gender, race, and immigration statuses may bring, it is no wonder the care economy is in crisis. As these disheartening realities have remained largely unchanged over the past 50 years, few will change without direct policy intervention.

Florida's Congressional delegation can address these longstanding inequities by co-sponsoring the National Domestic Workers Bill of Rights and encouraging their peers to put domestic workers on the agenda. The measure, reintroduced in July 2021, would mandate written contracts of scheduled hours and time off for each employee, including meal and rest breaks, paid overtime, and sick days. The legislation also includes protections against harassment and discrimination, authorizes workers to collectively bargain, creates a National Domestic Workers Hotline, and establishes a federal domestic worker task force, among other provisions. Importantly, the legislation would protect all domestic workers, whether undocumented immigrants or not.[27]

Without federal action, state policymakers should consider introducing a state Domestic Workers Bill of Rights, as 10 states (and two cities) have successfully done since 2010.[28] Inaction will not only continually harm these vital working Floridians, but it will dramatically sabotage the state's long-term care capabilities over time — for children, older adults, and all those who live with disabilities.

Methodological notes

- Wages include overtime, tips, and commission from the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (CPS). Domestic workers who offer child care in their own homes were excluded, as the CPS does not have strong wage data available for self-employed workers.
- *Domestic workers* are defined using the occupation and industry classifications in the CPS Outgoing Rotation Group and American Community Survey data sets. They comprise four categories of workers: House cleaners (occupation code 4230 and industry code 9290); nannies (occupation code 4600 and industry codes 9290 or 7580); providers of childcare in their own home (occupation code 4600 and industry code 8470), and home care aides. This includes non-agency-based home care aides who are paid directly

by clients (occupation codes 3600 and 4610 and industry codes 9290 and 7580) and agency-based home care aides who are part of a larger practice (occupation codes 3600 and 4610 and industry codes 8170 and 8370).

- *Home care aides* include both home health and personal care aides. Personal care aides assist older adults and those with disabilities with activities of daily living, including getting dressed, walking, bathing, and preparing meals. Home health aides may also provide personal care but are additionally qualified to provide health care services, including administering medication and caring for wounds.

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