

Domestic Workers Workgroup
Summary Notes - "After-Hours" Session
January 18, 2022

Work Group Attendees

- Sylvia Gonzalez
- Dana Barnett
- Kasey Bowen
- Fred DuBon

Introduction

Purpose for the meeting – hear from workers about their experiences to inform the work of the work group.

Work group is charged with meeting over the next year to come up with recommendations to the legislature on how to make it easier for workers comp coverage for those workers who are exempt.

Testimonials

Day Laborer #1: Casa Latina provided a work order for a client. The job was to cut the grass but the homeowner did not have the appropriate tools for the job, but she said to use it anyways. The lawnmower turned and caught a piece of metal. When I tried to release it, the metal cut my fingers on my right hand. I told the owner that I cut my hand and lost part of my fingers. The homeowner drove me to Harborview and then left. I had to have surgery on my hand, which included removing pieces to reattach my fingers. Afterwards I asked the homeowner if she could help me and she refused. I spent 3 months on disability with no funds or assistance. L&I said they could not help me and to check if the homeowner had homeowners insurance. I required financial aid from the hospital to cover the bills because I didn't have the money and had to apply for low income assistance. We need have some support when we can't work.

Domestic Worker #3: I have been dedicated to this kind of work 30 years. I had a house where I had been working for 8 months. The house had 3 stories and I always started at the top. I had already finished cleaning and mopping, I had cleaned the stairs and started polishing them. I didn't realize that my shoes were a little damp and was going down the second step with the vacuum and I slipped. It was 3 sets of stairs I went down and rolled down the 6 steps and I let go of the vacuum cleaner. I first apologized to the homeowner for dropping the vacuum and was asked if I wanted to leave. I thought about it but figured "if I leave she won't pay for any of the work I've already done", so I went ahead and finished. I continued working until about 3:00 pm. By then I was in so much pain I told the homeowner I was leaving a little early. During the drive home my legs were falling asleep and I was losing sensation in my right foot, it was a very scary drive. The next day I couldn't move at all. I went to the doctor and they recommended therapy. The therapy provider told me it would be about 2 months to recover and that I couldn't work. But I had to pay rent and food. There were people from my country who helped me but it was not enough. I was charged about \$1000 for therapy; but it did not help. I spent 3 months without work. After my recovery, the homeowner told me that "we don't need the help anymore because the

kids are doing it". We enjoy doing this work. We work hard and do it with care and dedication. I still have issues with my leg and some inflammation today.

Domestic Worker #4: I am been cleaning homes for about 10 years. 3 years ago when I was cleaning a home when one of the dogs bit my middle finger on my left hand. I was alone and scared. I looked for alcohol and gauze pads. The bleeding wouldn't stop so I called my boss and let them know I was going to leave without finishing the work. The homeowner told me to wait at the house and they would take me to the doctor and would pay for the bills as well as the days I wasn't able to work for them. because... the good thing was that I got into contact with my boss. However, they didn't pay for the other lost wages from not being able to work and had to wait 6 weeks before returning to work. I wasn't able to pay part of my rent because of this. The dog bite injured part of the tendons and still causes me issues today. Domestic workers should be covered by L&I.

Day Laborer #2: I have been a day laborer in Oregon and Washington. I wait at home depot. I had a house in Redmond where I did regular yard maintenance. The homeowner had a tree that needed trimmed. I usually stand on the shed to trim them. This one time, it was raining and little wet, I didn't feel it was safe but the homeowner told me she was having a party and that she needed it trimmed. I started trimming and a branch came down and took me with it. I fell on the ground; about a 7 foot drop. I felt that something was wrong with my right leg however, I knew the homeowner was having a party so I completed my work. 2 days later, I went SeaMar (clinic) and got a x-ray which showed a fracture. Casa Latina was able to help but I was not able to collect money from the homeowner. The homeowner said they felt like I got injured somewhere else and that was the last time I heard from her. I wasn't able to take care of myself and had to stay in a shelter. My family in Mexico didn't get any money. The homeowner never contacted me again for work.

Day Laborer #3: This recently happened after thanksgiving. I was sent on a job from Casa Latina to address garden drainage and needed to dig a trench. The trench was supposed to be deep and told the homeowner it wasn't safe and the dirt wasn't stable. The employer asked "do you want to work or complain" so I worked. One of my legs got stuck in the ditch and when I tried to get out and heard something pop. I told the employer and they gave me a phone number for a doctor and told me they would pay my bills. The next day I went to the clinic and I had a fracture. I called the employer and they never answered, I tried many times to get in touch with them and they have ignored me.

Discussion

Kasey – even in covered positions there can be a stigma against filing a workers comp claim.

Fred – it should be noted that these workers do some of the most dangerous jobs, jobs that other people wouldn't do because they are so dangerous. Homeowners are hiring these workers, rarely is it contractors.

- Workers hired by contractors would be covered by WC

Silvia – what about long term injuries and exposure? There are lots of chemicals used and these can cause issues later.

- When looking at workers comp, this is known as an occupational disease and is covered but first we have to get these types of workers covered.

Vero – what about safety standards? How does OSHA apply?