

LEGISLATION PROVIDES SAFETY COVER TO EXPOSED DOMESTIC WORKERS



Years of resentment against abuse by workers, was triggered off, by the alleged maltreatment of a 53 year, old Patricia Francois an immigrant from Trinidad and Tobago who was living in Flatbush. She alleged that she was ill-treated by her employer, while she was taking care of their daughter. Francois said. "The little girl I was taking care of is a wonderful little girl. I stayed in the job for a long time because of her, even though I endured a lot of verbal abuse and even though I have a family back home depending on me, he crossed the line by hitting me." She said he verbally abused her calling her a "stupid black bitch," and also telling her that he hoped that she died a "horrible death." Francois spent six and half years caring for wealthy Manhattan documentary filmmaker Mazer's young daughter, An incensed crowd, fuming mad, by the abuse committed on "a loving nanny" are holding a rally on Thursday, to send a strong message that they are united in this and such a thing will not be tolerated and must not be allowed to happen again. It is indeed highly ironic that these domestic helps are the custodians and caregivers of our most prized possessions, our children, elderly parents and our homes, yet we are so cold and insensitive to their needs and feelings. It is reported that they are amongst the most exploited and abused of society's workers. Jocelyn Gill-Campbell erstwhile nanny and organizer with Domestic Workers United, the largest coalition of nannies, housekeepers and caretakers in the city said, "We are the part of the 99% that is directly in contact with the 1% of this country every single day." "Domestic workers care for them, their loved ones, and the most precious elements of their lives, yet we are abused and mistreated," She concluded. Francois has filed a case against both the filmmaker and his wife, sports agent Sheryl Shade. In her suit she claims that she was punched in the face by Mazer, when he stopped her from shouting at his then 8 year old daughter. She has also claimed an unstipulated amount of overtime. The outcome of the case filed in 2008, is still awaited. Mazer not only refuted the allegations but his lawyer, Robert Gaulin said that it was she who had attacked his client and that Mazer never touched her. In 2010, New York became the first state to pass a Domestic Workers Bill of Rights, guaranteeing minimum standards domestic workers. There are more than such 200,000 such workers, mostly immigrants, who do jobs as nannies, housekeepers and care providers to the elderly. The New York Bill of Rights, among other things, gives workers, paid days of rest and safeguards them from discrimination and harassment. Advocates of worker's rights say that such laws will not serve their purpose until, employers who are guilty of domestic worker right violations are brought to justice. Jocelyn Gill-Campbell said, the law has had some effect, "Since the law passed, assaults are not as prevalent as before. Now it is more overtime issues, more common labor type disputes." The basic problem is that domestic workers are mostly immigrants and many are undocumented, owing to which they are almost always vulnerable to abuse by their employer. Domestic Workers Bill of Rights is a step in the right direction and will provide them with much needed social and legal safety nets.