'WE DON'T EXIST': TEXAS DOMESTIC WORKERS FIGHT FOR INCLUSION IN LABOR LAWS

Domestic workers already lacked contracts, wage protections, and health care benefits. Then, the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

ALEJANDRA ROJAS FOR THE OBSERVER

By Ivonne Coronado
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In the still darkness of pre-dawn, Maria closes her another day. Her clock reads 4:30 a.m. She shower and packs her work bag. Her children are still asleep. She leaves her apartment at 6:30. Friday. Then, she embarks on a 40-minute journey across Austin to visit her first workplace, a home where four hungry children, ranging in age from 9 months to 9 years, will soon sleepily assail her sheer-sugar-breakfast taco with the signature drink of choice.

From 6 to 8:30 a.m. the children are here. She cooks breakfast for them as they stop shorts of the children's wage of her childhood growing up in Estado de México. As she drives them to school, Maria speaks to them in Spanish, preparing them for a bilingual future. Then, the children's parents return ready for the day, and Maria moves on to her next family.

This isn't Maria's first rodeo. The 35-year-old nanny begun building after a mom to her generator's children to know where she was 15. "I knew nothing about kids back then. I was still one myself," Maria tells the Observer.

Her own children, who are now 13 and 10, live in Mexico with their grandparents. Six years ago, when she moved to Texas, Maria left them behind. She hoped to reunite with them, extended a every morning when she says goodbye to these four children. Her wages are split between sending money to her children and saving parents in Mexico, paying her immigration lawyer, and covering a stack of medical bills resulting from a brain tumor that doctors found in November. At the time, she asked one boss for two days off after realizing the pain prevented her from driving. Her boss fired her on the spot. After she had been surgery to December, she spent two months at home recovering, returning to work in late February only to once again be sent home after the COVID-19 pandemic began to spread.

Maria is one of the many domestic workers in the state of Texas who have been left out of the state's labor protections. The National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA), a nonprofit organization that lobbies for rights and benefits for domestic workers in the U.S., estimates that more than 2.5 million domestic workers are employed across the country, although there is no formal count. The workforce is mostly women of color, many of whom are immigrants, and they perform vital work that allows other women to participate in the economy and lead. After the bubble burst in