

I am more than a pair of hands: Letter from a childcare worker

Dear Employer,

I am writing this letter with hands that have cradled your children through fevers and nightmares; hands that have prepared thousands of meals, folded countless loads of laundry, soothed tantrums, and wiped away tears you never saw. These same hands are trembling now, not from exhaustion, but from the courage it takes to ask for what I should never have had to ask for in the first place: To be seen, to be valued, to be protected.

Let me begin by saying that I am grateful you opened your home to me when I had few options; thankful that you trusted me with what matters most to you – your children. I have watched them grow, celebrated their first words, soothed their fears, and loved them as if they were my own. This work is not just a job; it is my calling, and like all work, it deserves fair pay and dignified conditions. My love for this profession should not require “sacrificial wages”. It should not mean choosing between safeguarding my health and putting food on the table.

When your two younger brothers moved in, my workload increased significantly. There are now more people in the household to care for, more meals to prepare, and more cleaning to do. My days, which begin at 4am and end near midnight, have grown even longer. I wake before dawn to prepare breakfast and ensure everyone is ready and out the door on time. The day continues with laundry, cleaning, preparing lunch, caring for the baby, and running errands. Then comes dinner preparation, and after dinner, there are dishes to wash, the kitchen to scrub, uniforms to press for the next morning, the house to tidy, and the baby to settle before I can finally collapse into bed near midnight, only to wake again at 4am again. Yet, my salary – **Ksh7,000** per month – remains unchanged. It has never been enough, but now it is laughably inadequate. Let me show you the math: **rent is Ksh2,500, food Ksh2,000, and school fees Ksh5,000.** That's al-

ready **Ksh9,500**, which is **Ksh2,500** more than I earn. And I haven't even accounted for clothing, healthcare, transport, or emergencies. So I borrow from mobile lending apps and microfinance institutions, each loan carrying interest rates that devour the little I have. No grace period, no mercy. Each borrowed shilling digs me deeper into a hole I cannot climb out of. I am living one emergency away from losing everything.

Under Kenyan labour law, the current minimum wage for domestic workers is **Ksh16,113** per month. This is not a favour I am asking for. It is my right. I am asking you to pay me what my labour is worth. I am asking you to see that I am not just a helper, not just a pair of hands always available, always working.

When you leave for work each morning, you carry with you the gift of peace of mind, the knowledge that your children are in loving hands, that your home is running smoothly, and that the people you cherish most are safe and cared for. That peace of mind is the work I do. It is what makes it possible for you to walk out that door and earn your living, to focus on your career, attend meetings, meet deadlines, and build the life you envision for your family. I take pride in being part of that foundation. But I am also a mother, a daughter, a woman with dreams deferred and bills that don't care about my kindness, and my work should sustain my world as it sustains yours.

Last year when I collapsed from exhaustion and illness, you helped me get to the hospital, a kindness I will never forget. But the aftermath was a nightmare. I spent two months recovering, watching my savings disappear under the weight of medical bills, terrified I would lose my job because I could not work. I had no health insurance, no safety net, nothing to fall back on. When I finally returned, I was weaker, poorer, and more afraid than ever before.

This year, I am asking for healthcare coverage as part of my em-



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ployment. Not as charity, but as basic protection that every worker deserves. I am asking for a written contract that clearly outlines my duties, working hours, and days off, so that I am not constantly walking on eggshells, wondering whether asking for what is rightfully mine will cost me everything.

In line with my statutory rights, I am requesting my annual leave of 21 days. Over the two years I have been working for you, I have, without complaint, worked on Sundays, a day many reserve for family. But I am tired of feeling invisible, even to my own children. I have missed birthdays, school events, and moments when they needed me most, because work has always come first. I therefore request to take a portion of my cumulatively accrued leave, a few days each quarter, so that I can rest, heal, reconnect with my

family, and remember what it feels like to be more than just a worker.

I am not asking for anything extraordinary. I am asking for what is right: Fair pay, protection of my health, and time to rest. I am asking to be seen not as a convenience, but as a human being whose labour has value, whose life has worth, and whose dreams matter.

You have been a kind employer in many ways, and I believe you are a good person. I believe that if you truly understood what it means to survive on Ksh7,000 a month, to work without rest, to live without safety, you would not hesitate to make these changes. I believe you want to do right by me, just as I have always tried to do right by your family.

So I ask, will you meet me halfway? Will you recognise that caring for your children is skilled,

demanding, and exhausting work that deserves a living wage, basic protections, and human dignity? Will you help transform this job from one of survival into one of security?

I hope your answer is yes. Because I want to stay. I want to continue being part of your children's lives. I want to keep doing this work I love, but under conditions that allow me to live with dignity.

I am ready to discuss these requests at your earliest convenience. I hope we can find a path forward that honours both the trust you have placed in me and the rights I am finally brave enough to claim.

Respectfully,

Your Childcare Worker.

NOTE TO READERS:

This letter represents the voice of thousands of women childcare workers across Kenya; women who are indispensable yet invisible, valued yet exploited, trusted with our children yet denied basic dignity. The challenges highlighted here are not isolated incidents but systemic realities. As Kenya advances its National Care Policy 2025 and works toward ratifying ILO Conventions 189 and 190, this letter is a call to action, not just for individual employers, but for a nation ready to recognise care work as the essential infrastructure it has always been.