



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

O'Mara rejects replenishment of fund to make taxpayer-financed payments to undocumented immigrants: Following reports of fraud in the program, O'Mara urges reevaluation

THOMAS F. O'MARA January 12, 2022

| ISSUE: **EXCLUDED WORKERS FUND**



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Albany, N.Y., January 12—State Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats) today highlighted reports of fraud in the state's "Excluded Workers Fund" and rejected calls by supporters to replenish the fund in the upcoming state budget with another \$3 billion in taxpayer dollars.

The 2021-2022 state budget enacted last April by then-Governor Andrew Cuomo and Albany's legislative Democrats included a first-in-the-nation, \$2.1-billion "Excluded Workers Fund" to provide one-time, retroactive unemployment benefits to undocumented immigrants who were excluded from federal aid since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic because they are in the country illegally.

The fund opened for applications last August and was quickly depleted by October, with most of the more than 130,000 approved applicants receiving the state's maximum benefit of \$15,600, according to reports.

Reporting from CNHI earlier this week also revealed that, following suspicions of fraud, the state in late December terminated the ability of recipients to utilize state-issued Electronic Benefits Transfer cards to access the cash benefit at ATM machines. According to the CNHI report, the state Labor Department and State Police have opened an ongoing investigation.

O'Mara, the Ranking Member on the Senate Finance Committee, said, "I was strongly opposed last year to approving more than two billion dollars for a taxpayer-financed fund to make one-time payments to illegal immigrants. It stood out as one of the primary examples of the Albany Democrat giveaway that keeps getting higher and higher, more and more out of control, and going far beyond any reasonable sense of fairness, responsibility, or sustainability for hard-working, taxpaying citizens. These reports and suspicions of fraud within the Excluded Workers Fund come as no surprise to me and should at least make Governor Hochul and legislative Democrats take a step back before flooding it with another three billion dollars in taxpayer dollars."

O'Mara further notes, "New York's unemployment fund, for documented workers and citizens laid off, remains \$9 billion in the red owing the federal government. This massive debt has caused significant increases to employers' unemployment insurance costs which hinders rehiring of workers and job growth. This debt should be paid down with the windfall of federal COVID aid the state has received from the federal government and relief should be delivered to employers in the form of reduced unemployment insurance premiums."

An additional 300,000 applicants could be approved if the Excluded Workers Fund is replenished with \$3 billion in the upcoming 2022-2023 state budget as advocates and many Democrat state legislators are pushing for.