

Good Morning! My name is Aadit Siwakoti, I am a member of the DRUM (Desis Rising Up and Moving) Organization. I would like to thank the committee for giving me a chance to present my testimony. I am here in Support of the Unemployment Bridge Fund. I am originally from Nepal. I came to the United States in 2016 as an international Student. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, I used to work at a Deli, and during the pandemic, like hundreds of workers, I also lost my job and was laid off. Because of my immigration status, I was unable to receive any support from the city, state, or federal government. I did not have any money to pay my rent or to register for my last year of college which put my ability to stay in this country in jeopardy. I got involved in organizing for the Excluded Worker Fund, and am very thankful that it passed and I was able to get the fund and able to pay for and continue my education at Queens College. But many of my friends who were in a similar situation, could not get the grant because the fund was limited. Many of them were forced to drop out of college and lost their immigration status. Many of us who are a part of this city, who work in it, who contribute to making New York what it is, along with the rest of the immigrant communities.

This sort of catastrophe can happen any time, any year in the future, and there are many others, like freelancers, formerly incarcerated, students, and undocumented workers, who are the nails of this state and need to be protected. Most people in the United States have a safety net like Unemployment Insurance to rely on if they lose their job. Are we not workers like the rest? Do we not contribute to the economy like the rest? Without the initial fund, it is likely I would not have been able to stand here, in front of this body, and even be able to testify. I ask this body to pass the Unemployment Bridge Program so more workers in New York have their labor and contributions respected, and are supported in times of crisis.

Thank You.

