



Laundry Workers Center

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Good afternoon. My name is Juana Roldan. I am a member of the organization Laundry Workers Center. I am an excluded worker from the Bronx, New York.

Laundry Workers Center (LWC) is a non-profit that advocates for low wage-immigrant workers in the Laundromats, Food Services, and warehouse sectors. LWC empowers the workers through the organizing process. I am also a member of the Fund Excluded Workers coalition. Thank you for the opportunity to present my written testimony in the Workforce Development Hearing.

I am providing my testimony in support of the Unemployment Bridge Program in this year's New York State budget, which would provide unemployment coverage to 750,000 workers excluded from traditional insurance, with 30,000 people expected to get benefits at any time. This includes low-income New Yorkers - freelancers, self-employed, undocumented workers, people released from prison or immigrant detention, and those in the cash economy. Senator Jessica Ramos has re-introduced this bill - S3192 - to create this program, and Assemblymember Karines Reyes carries it in the Assembly.

Excluded workers like me will always face a crisis because we are not part of the social safety net. The unemployment bridge program should be included in this year's budget. Here's why:

I was a worker in a 99c store for more than four years. During the pandemic, my supervisor and I were the only ones who worked at the store as essential workers. There were no cashiers, and I had to learn to get a job after the worst of the pandemic. In September 2021, the employer fired me in the wrong way. The employer asked me for the keys to the store and told me to pick up all my things because they didn't want to see me there anymore. I was disconcerted! I felt so bad because I didn't know what I had done wrong. Without knowing what to say, I handed over the keys and left. I fell into extreme depression and felt so powerless for not being able to do anything. I lasted a month without work, living in a very uncertain time.

In-store, the employer paid me \$12.00/hour. There were more than six workers. I got very sick on one occasion and had to be home for a month. They never paid me for any sick days or any compensation. Until now, I know that the situation remains the same. The company is not paying workers the minimum wage.

The unemployment bridge program will bring equality for all the excluded workers, people released from prison, and freelancers. It would help people who had already suffered like me when I lost my job. I did not know what to do to pay our expenses, such as food, rent, and electricity, and provide for my family. The unemployment bridge program would be perfect and will help, so we don't feel excluded, as happened to us during the pandemic.



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My story is typical. Over 130,000 New Yorkers could access the historic Excluded Workers Fund, but in only nine weeks - we witnessed the enormous need for jobless aid - and how many New Yorkers live on the margins of the safety net. Immigrant workers pay over \$100 million a year into the Unemployment Insurance system in New York - but cannot access a cent. Undocumented workers pay \$1.1 billion yearly in New York state and local sales, property, and income taxes.

While we continue on the path to New York's complete recovery, we urge the state legislature to invest in social safety net programs that prepare us, safeguard our communities, and sustain our economy.

To summarize, I submit this testimony wholeheartedly supporting the Unemployment Bridge Program. We are counting on you, our elected representatives - to bring this program home.

Thank you for your time.

Juana Roldan
Member LWC & FEW Coalition