

Hello, my name is Daniel Vaughan-Cherubin and I am writing on behalf of the Northeast New York Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health. I want to thank the committee for the opportunity to write today in favor of the Unemployment Bridge Program.

The Northeast New York Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health is a non-profit organization serving the greater Capital District that supports low wage and marginalized workers by providing training, technical assistance, and advocacy.

The fight for the Excluded Workers Fund showed us that our safety net system is filled with gaps that unjustly shut out many of New York's most vulnerable workers, especially Black, brown, and immigrant workers in precarious low-wage industries. The Unemployment Bridge Program is a step in the right direction to provide unemployment compensation to workers who are excluded from regular unemployment insurance because of their immigration status or the type of work they do.

Many of our members, who worked tirelessly as essential workers to keep our communities running throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, are unfortunately excluded from the state's unemployment insurance system. Despite their hard work in the labor market, they were not able to access this vital safety net when they needed it most. As a result, when many of our members become unemployed, they are faced with challenges such as paying rent, buying food, and paying for utilities, among other things.

Unemployment compensation would have meant the world to our members when they were going through a temporary job loss. It would have helped to cover their basic needs, allowing them to maintain some stability and avoid financial ruin. The Unemployment Bridge Program would ensure that workers who are unemployed through no fault of their own, such as being laid off or experiencing a lack of work, are eligible for unemployment compensation.

It is important to recognize that being excluded from the unemployment system not only deprives workers of economic support, but it also hinders their ability to exercise their rights to safe and discrimination-free work. Without access to unemployment benefits, workers may feel forced to remain in dangerous or exploitative work environments in order to maintain a source of income. This puts them at greater risk of workplace injuries or illnesses, and it perpetuates a cycle of economic insecurity. By providing a safety net for those excluded from regular unemployment insurance, the Unemployment Bridge Program can help ensure that workers have the financial support they need to assert their rights in the workplace and demand safe and dignified working conditions.

The eligibility requirements for the Unemployment Bridge Program take the best practices of regular unemployment and the best lessons of implementing the Excluded Worker Fund. Workers who were fired for misconduct or voluntarily quit their jobs are disqualified. Workers must have worked at least 3 calendar months in the 12 months directly before the month of their unemployment. At minimum, they must have earned \$4,050 in earnings during those months. Because people in re-entry do not have sufficient earnings due to working for pennies on the dollar, earnings and income requirements are waived for those serving over one year.

The Unemployment Bridge Program would cost \$500 million and would be enough to cover a \$1,200 monthly payment for 30,000 people at any given time for six months in a given year. The funding also allocates 15% to administration costs for DOL and a community navigator program. This program is

estimated to cover up to 750,000 undocumented workers, cash earners, self-employed workers, and recently released individuals, assuming an unemployment rate of 6 percent and that 50% of eligible workers, or 30,000 New Yorkers, will collect benefits at any given time.

To ensure the Unemployment Bridge Program is revenue-neutral, the reintroduced bill adds a digital ad tax that is expected to raise up to \$1 billion for NYS. This tax would collect a small portion of annual revenues of digital advertising services from companies whose gross annual revenues from these services are \$100 million or more.

In conclusion, I urge the committee to support the Unemployment Bridge Program. It will provide much-needed support to workers who are excluded from regular unemployment insurance and who have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. This program will help ensure that the safety net system works for all New Yorkers, regardless of their immigration status or the type of work they do. Thank you for the opportunity to submit my testimony.

In Solidarity,

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