

El Centro Del Inmigrante

The Immigrant Center of Staten Island

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**EL CENTRO
DEL INMIGRANTE**

To Whom It Concerns:

Good afternoon, my name is Andrés García. I am the Executive Director of El Centro Del Inmigrante from Staten Island, New York.

El Centro Del Inmigrante Community Job Center has served the Staten Island Immigrant and worker communities for 25 years. Part of our efforts necessarily include advocating on behalf of any and all marginalized communities and members. I am also here today as a member of the Fund Excluded Workers coalition. Thank you for the opportunity to testify at today's Workforce Development Hearing.

I am testifying today 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 given time.. This includes low-income New Yorkers - freelancers, self-employed workers, 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.

To ensure the Unemployment Bridge Program is revenue-neutral, the 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 with gross annual revenues of \$100M from these services - leaving no burden on the state, small businesses, or individual taxpayers.

Studies show that for every dollar provided in unemployment compensation, recipients generate \$1.93 back into the economy. The Immigration Research Initiative estimates upwards of millions to be re-invested right back into New York. The solution is clear - ensuring access to the safety net is morally imperative, good for workers, the economy, and our communities.

Excluded workers will always face a crisis, because we are excluded from the social safety net. This program must be included in this year's budget. Here's why: Maria from the Port Richmond area shares a story that we have seen over and over. Because of her immigration status and the way her labor is classified, she was unable to access the support she needed and her and her family fell deeply behind in rent payments, lost the ability to properly feed and clothe her children, and was on the brink of homelessness. She was unable to find work in the wake of the pandemic and suffered exigent distress.

Maria's story is not unique. Over 130,000 New Yorkers were able to access the historic Excluded Workers Fund, but in only nine weeks - what we witnessed is the enormous need for jobless aid - and just how many New Yorkers live in the margins of the safety net.

The UBP is a lifeline for the self-employed. Freelance work is a growing part of our economy, Often denied or exempt from critical labor protections - the UBP would cover 180,000 thousand street vendors, truly self-employed beauty and nail salon workers, writers, photographers and digital media artists, management and technical consultants, auto repair and maintenance workers, and farm owners.

This is a carceral justice issue. 20,000 workers re-entering the labor force after prison or detention would be covered during their first year post release. Providing recently incarcerated people access to UI is cost-effective. Recidivism can cost the state upwards of \$50,000 per person per incident; this fund would provide a maximum of \$7,200 per year in benefits (6 months times \$1,200), and would give everyone the security of knowing they could be covered if they needed it.

This is an immigrant justice issue. 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 every year in New York state and local sales, property, and income taxes.

For those in the shadows of the cash economy - the street vendors, the domestic workers, nannies, service and restaurant workers and day laborers often exploited in informal industries - the UBP would provide a critical support in hard times.

Lastly, this is a racial and economic justice issue.

The Immigration Research Initiative has [found](#) that 73% of the New Yorkers who would benefit from the Unemployment Bridge Program are non-white, compared to 27% who are white. Black and brown workers are disproportionately impacted by unemployment with for example Black unemployment rates typically running nearly twice as high as the rate for white..

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

Our families' ability to survive and put food on the table depends on it.

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

Thank you for your time.



Andrés García
Executive Director
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