

February 17th, 2023

Good afternoon, my name is Julie Dragonetti. I work as a Campaign Organizer at the Worker Justice Center of New York in Rochester, New York. This written testimony is being submitted on behalf of Emma Kreyche, Director of Advocacy, Outreach, & Education at the Worker Justice Center of New York, who has submitted to give in-person testimony at the 3/1 hearing.

The Worker Justice Center of New York pursues justice for those denied human rights with a focus on agricultural and other low wage workers, through legal representation, community empowerment and advocacy for institutional change. We have offices in Rochester, Kingston, and Hawthorne, NY and provide services to workers across the state. We work closely with immigrant farmworker communities in upstate New York. The Worker Justice Center of New York is also a steering committee member of the Fund Excluded Workers coalition.

I am testifying today in support of the Unemployment Bridge Program (S3912) in this year's New York State budget, which would provide unemployment coverage to 750,000 workers excluded from traditional unemployment 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 the bill 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 like our clients will always face a crisis, because they are excluded from the social safety net. That is why this program must be included in this year's budget. At the Worker Justice Center of New York, we assisted clients with the application process for the Excluded Worker Fund. The need during this time was extremely high, and not everyone who needed financial assistance was able to receive it. Throughout the entire pandemic, immigrant farmworkers have been essential workers who made sure that all New Yorkers had food on their table. But when these same workers are in need, they do not have access to any safety net from the state. Immigrant farmworkers so often live in the shadows and are not able to stand up for

themselves when they face labor violations, due to the fear of losing their income and the housing that comes along with it. Although non-profit organizations like the Worker Justice Center of New York are able to provide support to farmworkers in need, our capacity is limited. Without government programs such as the Unemployment Bridge Program, we simply do not have adequate resources to meet the needs of all who come to us for help.

Our situation is not unique. Over 130,000 New Yorkers were able to access the historic Excluded Workers Fund, but funds were depleted 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.

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 critical support in hard times.

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.

Their 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.

I would also like to express support for the Raise the Wage Act (S1978/A2204) to raise the minimum wage to \$21.25 across the state by 2027 and index yearly increases to inflation and worker productivity moving forward. This is another essential piece of legislation for workers across the state who, without this change, will continue to struggle to make ends meet for themselves and their families. This minimum wage proposal would affect 2.9 million workers across the state and would generate additional revenue for New York's economy.