



New York State Legislature
Joint Legislative Budget Hearing - Workforce
Testimony from the New York Immigration Coalition

February 2nd, 2021

Good Afternoon. My name is Vanessa Agudelo and I am the Manager of Member Engagement for the Hudson Valley at the New York Immigration Coalition, an umbrella policy and advocacy organization that works statewide with over 200 immigrant-serving member organizations. Thank you to the legislative members and both chairs for convening this important hearing allowing me to testify.

The COVID-19 crisis has and continues to hit Black, Indigenous, people of color(BIPOC), immigrant, and working class individuals the hardest. In almost every way, immigrants and their families have been some of the hardest hit by the pandemic and the ensuing response. Immigrants risk heightened exposure to COVID-19 as essential workers, and when sick, suffer higher mortality rates. Immigrants are over-represented in the industries hardest hit by the economic downturn, and were therefore more likely to be left unemployed than the native born workforce. And many immigrant families were shamefully and purposely shut out of federal relief efforts and continue to struggle.

COVID-19 has not only taken far too many New Yorkers from us but it has also wreaked havoc on our economy. New York State faces a \$60 billion dollar deficit. We understand the need to manage this deficit but reject any effort that would see the budget balanced on the backs of the working class and low-income New Yorkers. Any cuts to education, healthcare or other social service or safety net programs will only exacerbate the effects of this pandemic on individuals and families across the state.

We are supporting the effort that will both support the workers that were excluded while also helping to close future budgets gaps. Even under extreme economic conditions we still have the ability to feed two birds with one seed. This legislature must pass and the Governor must deliver long-overdue relief: we/our members have received nothing. Our coalition is asking for \$3.5 billion dollars to create a fund to provide emergency financial relief to immigrant workers, individuals recently released from incarceration or immigrant detention, and businesses or the self-employed individuals who lack documentation to apply for small business relief. This fund would:

- Provide flat rate monthly cash payments direct to families - based on \$750 per week to each worker - what a typical low wage worker with Unemployment Insurance receives.
- Offer monthly payments retroactive to the start of the COVID-impacted unemployment crisis, and continuing at least through the end of 2020, like Unemployment Insurance, with triggers to continue the program thereafter.

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- Offer flexible application and proof requirements given the urgent crisis situation. Include self-attestation and information that off the books workers are able to provide - documents for proving identity can be the same as those for getting drivers licenses under Green Light.

Our healthcare workers, grocery store workers, delivery workers, transit workers and all other frontline workers have helped maintain our way of life while paying the ultimate price of disproportionate deaths due to COVID-19. Meanwhile, many wealthy New Yorkers continued to flourish. New York State's 120 billionaires saw their combined wealth rise by over \$77 billion dollars in the first months of the pandemic. We must demand that those who have profited the most during this crisis pay their fair share to support the recovery of the State.

Once again, thank you for convening this extremely important hearing and allowing me to testify. Myself, our entire organization looks forward to continuing to work with you all to come up with solutions that ensure that everyone enjoys full and equal opportunity to recover from the threat of this virus and the worst potential economic downturn since the Great Depression.