

My name is Marco Castillo and it is my honor to speak on behalf of the Indigenous Interpreters Network, the Transnational Villages Network and the Council of Indigenous Immigrants living in NY.

Let me begin by acknowledging we are standing on indigenous land and thanking the committee for the opportunity to speak and bring the message from indigenous immigrants.

I am here to stand in favor of the Excluded Worker Bail Out Fund. It is critical to provide immediate support for those who have been excluded from relief programs.

According to Mexican authorities, the majority of Mexicans living in NYS come from indigenous and rural communities. This means that more than 175,000 New Yorkers.

This population has struggled historically to adapt and navigate the government system. For a large percentage, neither Spanish nor English is their primary language, and for many of them New York is the first urban space they have lived in.

Because of this and the lack of recognition of immigration status, these communities have preferred to stay in the shadows without reaching for any kind of help and government support, while working extensive hours for minimum wage, living in mixed status homes with precarious conditions.

During COVID19, the majority of the indigenous immigrant community continue working as essential workers, cooking and delivering food, cleaning homes and stores, taking care of elders and serving clients at grocery stores.

Many of them didn't understand the risks and impacts of COVID19 and the information the City and state provided wasn't translated to indigenous languages, despite the fact that some of them, like Mixteco are spoken by more than 1,000 New York residents.

I worked, accompanied and witnessed the pain, suffering and death of no less than 300 indigenous immigrants dying because of COVID19. Some of them at home, fearing deportation if they went to a hospital. All of them worked until they couldn't get up, without knowing they had the virus.

And the majority of this population hasn't received any kind of government support. The Rent Relief program offered by the State, again required technology and it wasn't available in indigenous language. We helped almost 50 people to apply and only 1 obtained support. The rest were rejected because they couldn't demonstrate loss of income. Many of them get paid in cash and couldn't prove their income.

Right now, almost 400 families, more than 60% of the membership of the groups I represent here owe 4 months of rent and are expecting the worst in the coming months. Some of them are moving with relatives, onto shelters or to the streets.

Indigenous immigrants have given it all to this city, and during this pandemic they proved to be willing to put themselves in the frontlines. In exchange, this state has had no considerations, no response, no acknowledgment of their need for help.

Right now you have the opportunity to act. Please vote for the Excluded Worker Bail Out Fund. This state will never move forward and away from this crisis without its essential workers. Indigenous immigrants are at the core of this sector.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak.