

Good afternoon, my name is Cole Edick. I am a member of Persist Brooklyn, a group of volunteer political organizers in Brooklyn, New York. Persist Brooklyn, mostly led by young people like me, pursues electoral activism, political education, and activist training to strengthen participation in democracy and advance progressive change. As part of that mission, 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 Hearing.

I am testifying today in support of an excluded worker bail out fund, which would deliver desperately needed income replacement assistance for New Yorkers ineligible for unemployment benefits. This includes New Yorkers that are undocumented and recently incarcerated, as well as those who operate within the cash economy and families that have lost their primary breadwinners due to the coronavirus pandemic. Senator Jessica Ramos has introduced bill S8277B to create this fund and Assemblymember Carmen de la Rosa will introduce an equivalent bill in the Assembly.

Excluded workers have gone nine months without any support and can wait no longer: this fund must be included in this year's budget. Here's why:

My friend Ana, for whom I use a pseudonym, came to the United States a little over a year ago, bringing her three young children with her. Ana and her children faced domestic and sexual abuse in Honduras, and endured unspeakable horrors during the year it took them to make their way to the United States—mostly on foot—through Guatemala and Mexico. I volunteered to assist her in completing and filing asylum documents in early 2020. Despite a strong case, Ana was denied asylum at immigration court when, unable to afford a lawyer, she was forced to represent herself *pro se*. She is currently seeking a lawyer to assist her in filing her appeal. When the Covid-19 pandemic struck and foot traffic in our city plummeted, Ana lost what meager profits she was making selling goods in the street. Barely able to feed and care for her children on this rapidly-declining income (sometimes missing meals), it wasn't even a question that Ana would have to put saving for her legal fees on pause. Because she is undocumented, Ana has not received any of the cash assistance or unemployment benefits that other New Yorkers have been eligible for, assistance that could have helped Ana keep her children sheltered and fed, and maybe—just maybe—stow a little away for the legal fees that could one day help her appeal her asylum case to protect her and her kids from deportation. Pursuing asylum should be Ana's right, not a privilege reserved only for those who can pay for it. But because this government has not yet found the courage to ensure the basic needs of people like Ana during a national crisis, she has had to put her rights on hold.

This story is not unique: 597,000 undocumented New Yorkers are shut out of unemployment benefits even though they pay taxes into the system. Nearly 20,000 recently incarcerated New Yorkers released before or during the pandemic and struggling to find stable employment are ineligible as well, since you need work history to qualify for unemployment. People who work for cash -- street vendors, domestic workers, and other New Yorkers -- who cannot report sufficient earnings or a job are also left out. Excluded workers provide essential services including delivery, cleaning, laundry, construction, warehousing, food preparation and more.

The Assembly, Senate and Governor must deliver long-overdue relief: the excluded workers in our community and in this coalition have received nothing. Our coalition is asking for \$3.5 billion dollars to create a fund that:

- Delivers flat rate monthly cash payments direct to families
- Includes retroactive payments from the onset of COVID unemployment crisis, continuing at least through the end of the state of emergency

- Uses flexible application and proof requirements given the urgency of this crisis

We believe it is time to tax the rich to fund the poor: New York billionaires have grown wealthier during the pandemic, while excluded workers struggle to put food on the table. We wholeheartedly support the Mark to Market tax as one way forward. The Invest in Our New York Act includes 5 other new, progressive recurring revenue raises that can be used to create this fund and support other community needs, such as rent relief, equitable school funding and more. Our priority is bailing out excluded workers: we are counting on you, our elected representatives, to find a way to fund it. Their families' ability to survive and put food on the table depends on it.

To summarize, I submit this testimony in support of an excluded worker bailout fund, as described in forthcoming legislation from Senator Ramos and Assemblymember de la Rosa. Thank you for your time.