



We care for our community.

January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2022

Hello, my name is Javier Ramirez-Baron and I am the Executive Director of Cabrini Immigrant Services of New York City. We are a non-profit organization located in the Lower East Side of Manhattan that provides immigration legal services, social services, and community education to immigrant families from all around New York City.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony. I am writing today as a member of the Fund Excluded Workers Coalition, which includes more than 100 organizations from across New York State. I am submitting this testimony to ensure the voices of the hundreds of hard-working immigrant families we support are heard. On behalf of Cabrini Immigrant Services of NYC (CIS-NYC) and our members, I would like to express my support for replenishing the Excluded Worker Fund with \$3 billion and establishing a permanent alternative to unemployment for excluded workers.

The Excluded Workers Fund has transformed the lives of hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers, allowing working families to finally get back on their feet after nearly two years of pain and loss. At CIS-NYC we saw the desperate need for this fund when our office was immediately overwhelmed by calls from workers asking for assistance applying for the fund. We received funding from the Department of Labor to assist community members with applications, however our contract was only executed one week before the announcement went out that funds were nearing exhaustion. In the short amount of time the fund was open, our organization scrambled to train existing staff, hire new staff, conduct outreach, and educate our community about the fund, all while trying to support our clients in getting their applications in as quickly as possible. Staff members from our other programs had to support our EWF staff while we worked to hire the necessary staff and obtain the necessary resources. Our small staff helped 150 individuals apply for the fund, however, there were many we were unable to assist before the fund quickly ran out. After the fund closed, we continued to receive calls from workers whose applications had been denied because the funds had run out, or who had not had the chance to apply in the first place. We have had calls from clients who are experiencing homelessness, who are at risk of eviction, or who cannot feed their families, because they have not received any form of relief over the course of the pandemic. Recently, we referred over 50 of these individuals to a local organization that is providing small grants to families who did not receive EWF funds, however the grants of a few hundred dollars will only make a small dent in the debts these families have, and many won't even be granted these funds. New York State must step up to support these workers and their families.

One of our clients, Marcelina, was one of the many individuals who was eligible for the fund, but didn't receive funds because they had run out by the time she applied. Before the pandemic Marcelina worked cleaning houses, but she quickly lost work when the pandemic began and her employers began to quarantine. Her entire family got sick with COVID, so she and her adult

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children were unable to work and provide for her young grandchildren. After many months of unemployment and medical bills, her family is severely in debt. They did not receive pandemic relief from the federal government, and are not eligible for unemployment. The Excluded Workers Fund would have had a profound impact on her life, allowing her family to begin paying off months of debt. By replenishing the Excluded Workers Fund with an additional \$3 billion dollars New York State can serve an additional 120,000 workers in New York City, providing workers like Marcelina with desperately needed support.

Additionally, New York State must act this session to establish a permanent alternative to unemployment insurance by passing the "Excluded No More" legislation, which is sponsored by Senator Jessica Ramos and Assemblymember Karines Reyes and is awaiting a bill number. Throughout the pandemic, we have seen the massive gaps in our safety net: the fact that we needed to set up a fund for excluded workers in a rush and in a time of crisis is a travesty. We know that immigrants who are undocumented are often paid below the minimum wage and the most vulnerable to wage theft. They are the backbone of many industries and pay taxes without seeing returns and deserve to be excluded no more. We need to make sure low-wage undocumented workers, workers paid in cash (like domestic workers and day laborers), and self-employed workers have access to support when unemployment hits, no matter what they do or where they're from.

At Cabrini Immigrant Services of NYC, we have seen firsthand the importance of ensuring all New Yorkers have access to the safety net. At our Food Pantry we saw a massive increase in clients when many of our clients lost their jobs due to the pandemic and were unable to put food on the table without any income. Over the years, we have heard from many community members who have been pressured into abusive or dangerous working situations, because they fear being unable to make ends meet without access to unemployment benefits. We know that by making sure all New Yorkers have access to the safety net, we can make our state as a whole stronger and more resilient.

The Assembly, Senate and Governor must deliver justice to workers who are still awaiting COVID relief and a true safety net for excluded workers in the long run. To summarize, I submit this testimony in support of \$3 billion more for the Excluded Workers Fund and the Excluded No More legislation. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Javier Ramirez-Baron". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J".

Javier Ramirez-Baron, LMSW  
Executive Director  
Cabrini Immigrant Services of NYC