

Hearing: Workforce Development

January 31st, 2022

Sandra Vidal, Union Settlement

Good afternoon, my name is Sandra Vidal. I currently serve as the Project Manager for the, Excluded Workers Fund at Union Settlement. Union Settlement is a not- for profit organization founded in 1895 in East Harlem. Since opening, Union Settlement has served a low-income community that is culturally rich and diverse.

Union Settlement is the only organization in East Harlem selected by the Department of Labor to help assist eligible community members apply to the Excluded Workers Fund.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify at today's Workforce Hearing. I am here today as a member of the Fund Excluded Workers coalition, which includes more than 100 organizations across New York State.

I am testifying today in support of replenishing the Excluded Workers Fund with \$3 billion along with establishing a permanent safety net for excluded workers in the state of New York.

The COVID-19 pandemic has severely impacted our community members in particular, undocumented immigrant community members who have no safety net.

While this grant has allowed Union Settlement to assist a total of 490 community members apply, the need for economic relief among our immigrant community members especially those who have been deemed essential workers continues to be high.

Due to limited funds the Department of Labor denied applications from September 25th-October 8th. **50% of our community members who applied via our assistance are right where they began, with no economic relief.** Excluded workers continue to be at the margins, placing them in a vulnerable state with no social or economic benefits to protect them during these challenging times. **According to the Immigration Research Initiative, in New York City, Excluded Workers Fund recipients gave a direct boost of \$1.6 billion to our local economy.** In East Harlem, the excluded workers fund recipients were able to pay for rent, utilities, groceries, and find some minor economic relief.

If an additional \$3 billion are allocated to the Excluded Workers Fund another 120,000 families can be assisted in New York City and our local economy can be boosted by \$1.9 billion. Families will be able to invest in their future and in our communities.

Yet, we know that this will not be enough. We need to establish a permanent alternative to ensure that the needs of excluded workers are placed at the forefront. New York State must seek an alternative and provide a safety-net that supports excluded workers. New York State was the

first in the nation to create a \$2.1 billion Excluded Workers Fund. It can also be the first in the nation to ensure a permanent solution.

The Assembly, Senate and Governor must deliver justice to workers who are still awaiting COVID-19 relief. In conclusion, **I submit this testimony in support of \$3 billion more for the Excluded Workers Fund and for a permanent safety- net that can provided our excluded workers with the support needed.** Thank you for your time.