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TO: Joint Budget Hearing on Workforce Development and Labor

FROM: Terry Diggory, Co-Coordinator, Saratoga Immigration Coalition

The Saratoga Immigration Coalition (SIC), which I help to coordinate, is based in Saratoga Springs. We are a volunteer network partnering with service providers, faith communities, civic organizations, and concerned individuals to support immigrants residing in Saratoga, Warren and Washington Counties. As part of our advocacy work, we participate in the Fund Excluded Workers coalition.

I am writing in support of the Unemployment Bridge Program (UBP) in this year's New York State budget. UBP would provide unemployment coverage to 750,000 workers excluded from traditional insurance with 30,000 people expected to get benefits at any given time.. This includes low-income New Yorkers - freelancers, self-employed workers, undocumented workers, people released from prison or immigrant detention, and those in the cash economy. Senator Jessica Ramos has re-introduced this bill - S3192 - to create this program and Assemblymember Karines Reyes carries it in the Assembly.

The immigrant workers supported by SIC experience unsteady unemployment due not only to their immigration status but also to their participation in a tourist economy subject to seasonal and economic fluctuations. They are part of a larger labor force who work in hotels, restaurants, and at Saratoga Race Course. The terms on which they are hired often prevent them from qualifying for existing forms of unemployment insurance. Yet when they are working, they make a huge contribution to the state economy by attracting dollars spent by tourists from outside the state. If they were to qualify for unemployment insurance, the workers themselves would continue to contribute to the economy even while out of work. Studies show that for every dollar provided in unemployment compensation, recipients generate \$1.93 back into the economy. The Immigration Research Initiative estimates upwards of millions to be re-invested right back into New York.

As currently proposed, the Unemployment Bridge Program itself would be revenue-neutral. The bill adds a digital ad tax that is expected to raise up to \$1 billion for New York State. This tax would collect a small portion of annual revenues of digital advertising services from companies with gross annual revenues of \$100M from these services - leaving no burden on the state, small businesses, or individual taxpayers.

While the economic arguments in favor of the Unemployment Bridge Program are strong, the moral arguments are even stronger. Workers have rights, and those rights should include protection against the failures of a system that prevents them from working from time to time. Workers have families, and their ability to provide for their families consistently is one of the foundations of social cohesion and stability.

While we continue on the path to New York's full recovery, we urge the state legislature to invest in social safety net programs that prepare us, safeguard our communities, and sustain our economy. We wholeheartedly support the Unemployment Bridge Program, and we are counting on you, our elected representatives, to bring this program home.

Thank you for your attention.