

Written Testimony for the 3/1 Housing and Labor Workforce Hearings

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Good afternoon, my name is Angeles Solis and I am a Lead Organizer at Make the Road New York. Our organization is 24,000 members strong across New York City, Westchester and Long Island. We represent tenants, workers, immigrants, and families fighting for protections in their home, workplace and community.

Our members survive in the margins of the social safety net. Far too many New Yorkers are excluded from access to healthcare coverage, unemployment insurance and tenant protections. These exclusions are not new, but the lesson of the pandemic in New York made clear that the legislature must pass preventative safety net programs and protections before the next crisis hits, not when it is too late.

I am testifying today in support of four critical legislations that will greatly impact the future of New Yorkers, and the lives of our members.

Let's begin with the Unemployment Bridge Program (S3192), carried by Senator Ramos and Assemblymember Karines Reyes.

The UBP is a revenue-neutral, permanent solution for over 750,000 New Yorkers ineligible for traditional unemployment insurance, with 30,000 people expected to receive benefits at any given time. Excluded workers are freelancers, self-employed workers, undocumented workers, those recently released from incarceration and those in the cash economy.

The UBP would be a lifeline - providing a partial or up to \$1200 in jobless aid each month - for up to six months for excluded workers. It will boost the economy of regions across New York state, ensure New Yorkers have the means to keep their home, stay in their community, and put food on the table. For people in re-entry, a lifeline of economic support will greatly reduce recidivism rates and lower the states cost of incarceration.

Furthermore, 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. If the legislature can justify \$455M in subsidies to the Belmont Race Track, it is only right and responsible to ensure those who labor to make them run - including that of excluded workers - have safety net to fall back on.

This \$500M program would be funded through a Digital Ad Tax - expected to generate over \$1B in revenue for New York state, by collecting a small portion of revenue from corporations with \$100M in gross revenue or more - leaving no impact on small businesses or individual taxpayers. The New York legislature can and must address discriminatory exclusions in UI. We need a 21st century safety net for a 21st century workforce - and the UBP will get us there.

Second, Coverage For All (A3020/S2237), carried by Assemblymember Gonzalez-Rojas and Senator Rivera.

Coverage for All will expand health insurance to all low-income immigrants who are currently ineligible for coverage due to their immigration status between the ages of 19-64. This should be done by including immigrants in the federal 1332 waiver request to secure federal funding to enroll low-income excluded immigrants into the

Essential Plan. If the waiver is denied, New York should provide state-only funded Medicaid coverage for immigrants.

An estimated 245,000 uninsured New Yorkers between the age 19-64 are excluded from federally funded health insurance (such as Medicaid and the Essential Plan) because of their immigration status. Other states such as Colorado, Washington, California and Illinois have expanded coverage to immigrants, and New York is now falling behind.

Governor Hochul's budget proposal backs away from her promise last year to include immigrant coverage in the 1332 Waiver application. The Waiver application was supposed to use the existing federal-funded Basic Health Plan/Essential Plan Trust Fund to pay for immigrant coverage and increase the Essential Plan income eligibility for all New Yorkers up to 250% of the FPL. The BHP/EP Trust fund has a \$9 billion surplus which increases by \$2 billion each year. Federal rules say this trust fund can only be used to pay for health insurance coverage. The Governor should ask the federal government to pay for health insurance for immigrants at no cost to the state. Including immigrants in the waiver would save New York \$500 million, which it currently spends providing bare bones Emergency Medicaid coverage to immigrants.

Therefore, NYS should 1) Include immigrants in the 1332 waiver request to the federal government and 2) Include the Coverage for All legislation in the final state budget.

Third, the Housing Access Voucher Program (S568A/ A4021) and Good Cause Eviction (S305/A4454):

The housing crisis that has plagued our state for two decades has never been worse, and the Governor, Senate, and Assembly all agree that this year, we must act. Unfortunately, the plan put forward in the Executive budget does very little to ease the immediate crisis we face. While new housing construction is important in the long run, what our communities need right now is greater protections for tenants and funding for rental assistance. Two bills, Good Cause Eviction and the Housing Access Voucher Program, are the most comprehensive solution we have to address the onslaught of housing insecurity and homelessness plaguing our state. We should fund HAVP for \$250 million a year for 5 years. These two bills both have widespread support in both the Senate and the Assembly, and we should fight hard to make sure they are included in the final budget.

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. Our families ability to survive and put food on the table depends on it.

To summarize, I submit this testimony on behalf of three critical pieces of legislation - The Unemployment Bridge Program, Coverage For All, and the Housing Access Voucher Program.

We are counting on you, our elected representatives - to remedy long standing exclusions in our social safety net. Fix the roof while the sun is shining, not in the middle of a hurricane.

Thank you for your time.