



NYS Faith Leaders Memorandum of Support Unemployment Bridge Program (S3192 / A4821)

March 7th, 2023

Dear Governor Hochul and Members of the New York State Legislature:

We write to you as concerned New York faith leaders on behalf of New York workers who have been unjustly shut out from our state's unemployment insurance system, in support of the **Unemployment Bridge Program**, a transformative program that would finally give our state's most vulnerable workers access to a financial lifeline if they lose work.

In 2021, the Excluded Workers Fund delivered life-changing support to hundreds of thousands of workers across New York who were denied any real relief during the pandemic. It also revealed gaping holes in our social safety net that unjustly shut out the most vulnerable workers, especially Black, brown, and immigrant workers in precarious low-wage industries.

When the Social Security Act of 1935 first established federal unemployment insurance, it left out nearly half of workers in the U.S. economy, primarily workers of color in contingent low-wage jobs like domestic workers and agricultural workers. Nearly a century later, those exclusions are still with us, and workers of color are still disproportionately excluded from getting unemployment support.

Workers excluded from Unemployment Insurance are becoming an ever-bigger part of our economy and the Unemployment Bridge Program would protect this ever-growing labor force of freelancers, self-employed workers, immigrant workers and workers in re-entry. As a whole, it would protect **750,000 workers, including 180,000 freelancers, 470,000 undocumented workers, 80,000 domestic workers and day laborers paid in cash, and 20,000 people in re-entry.**

Our support for excluded workers draws deeply on our faith traditions, captured in the Hebrew Book of Deuteronomy, *"You shall not oppress a hired worker who is poor and needy."* (Deuteronomy 24:14) And it is rooted in our service to our vulnerable neighbors, which demands that we challenge unjust economic systems that create their vulnerability and require our charity.

Exclusion from unemployment insurance is one of these unjust systems. Unemployment compensation is an essential labor right. It provides a cushion for workers who are laid off or whose employers go out of business. It allows unemployed workers to pay their rent, feed their children and make ends meet until a new job is found. And unemployment compensation helps workers speak up against labor violations on the job and leave abusive employers without worrying that they'll lose everything if they do so.

We know many excluded workers by the essential labor they provide our families and communities. We know these workers by name because, when they are laid off with no safety net to fall back on, our pantries and outreach centers feed and clothe their families and help with unpaid rent. Some are members of our congregations and they are our neighbors. Our congregations have done our part with charitable support to ease their suffering caused by lost income. We cannot do much more to help them.

Many excluded workers are also New Yorkers released from incarceration who worked while in detention but whose labor is not recognized as employment. In the eyes of the Unemployment Insurance system, the work performed by incarcerated workers does not count toward the accrual of UI benefits. Incarcerated workers staff hundreds of jobs, from prison maintenance to program administration, truck drivers, factory workers and manufacturing. They build the desks that you sit at in the State Capitol. All the while, they are deprived of basic workplace protections, including the right to refuse work. As faith leaders we are committed to restorative justice for formerly incarcerated people, in part meaning they should be welcomed back into the community rather than treated with "coercion and isolation." The Unemployment Bridge Program does just that!

Almost three thousand years ago, the great Hebrew Prophet Amos commanded his people to *"see that justice is done."* (Amos 5:15). Today, we respond to Amos by calling on you to see that justice is done. Please enact the Unemployment Bridge Program so that New Yorkers excluded from unemployment insurance will have a much needed safety net should they lose their jobs.
Respectfully,

The following faith leaders strongly urge that this legislation be included in the New York State SFY 2023-24 budget.

Signed,

Rev. Alison Qukn, Grace Year Program Millbrook, NY
Rev. Frank J. Alagna, Ph.D., Holy Cross/Santa Cruz Episcopal Church, Kingston, NY
Rev. Elizabeth G. Maxwell, Church of the Ascension, Manhattan, NY
Rev. Susan E. Hill, Church of the Holy Apostles, Manhattan, NY
Rev. Dr. Matthew Calkins, Grace Episcopal Church, Millbrook, NY
Rev. Frank Morales, Episcopal Diocese of New York, New York City
Sister Elizabeth Broyles, Companions of Mary the Apostle, West Park, NY
Rev. Joe Papparone, Labor-Religion Coalition of NYS, Albany, NY
Rector Janice Kotuby, Church of the Resurrection, Hopewell Junction, NY
Margot Jepson, Interfaith Council Member and Parishioner, Holy Cross/Santa Cruz Episcopal Church & Church of the Resurrection, Kingston, NY
Jonathan Leahy, Member at Baha'i's of Hurley, West Hurley, New York
Father Duvert, St Luke's Episcopal Church, Bronx, NY
Pastor/Rev. James Childs, Pointe of Praise Family Life Center, Kingston, NY
Pastor Doris Schuyler, Riverview Missionary Baptist Church, Kingston, NY
Rev. West McNeill, NYS Labor-Religion Coalition, Albany, NY
Rashida Tyler, Deputy Executive Director at New York State Council of Churches, Albany, NY
Parishioner Carolyn Dickey, Holy Cross Episcopal Church, Kingston, NY
Terry Diggory, Elder at Presbyterian--United Church of Christ, Saratoga Springs, NY
Rev. Susan Auchincloss, St. Gregory's Episcopal Church, Woodstock, NY
Rev. Debra Jameson, Capitol Region, NY
Sister Danielle Bonetti, Sisters of St. Joseph Albany, Watervliet, NY
Priest Fr. Steve Schunk, St. Mary's Episcopal Church in-the-Highlands, Cold Spring, NY
Dr. Deni Mack, RocACTS, Rochester, NY
Dr. Angela Sims, Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School, Rochester, NY
Rev. Lori Vail, Mary Magdalene Church, East Rochester, NY
Clerk of Session Nancy Brown, Downtown United Presbyterian Church, Rochester, NY
Rev. Edward L Palumbos, Senior Priest at St Mary's Church Downtown, Rochester, NY
Rev. Kirk Laubenstein, United Church of Christ Pastor, Buffalo, NY
Rev. Nancy Rosas, Pilgrim-St. Luke's United Church of Christ, Buffalo, NY
Rev. Dr. Peter W. Peters, St Luke & St Simon Cyrene Episcopal Church, Rochester, NY

Rev. Drew Ludwig, Presbytery of Western New York, Buffalo, NY
Rev. Robert Thomas Werth, St. Frances Xavier Cabrini, Rochester, NY
Patricia Singh, Anti-Racism Committee Member at Third Presbyterian Church, Rochester, NY
Deacon Michael Kristan, Sacred Heart Cathedral, Rochester, NY
Mrs. Annette Hunt, The Cathedral Community, Rochester, NY
Jim Tappan, Elder at Irondequoit Presbyterian Church, Irondequoit, NY
Rabbi Drorah Setel, Temple Emanu-El. Rochester, NY
Jerry Rivers, Roosevelt and Freeport Church of Christ, Long Island, NY
David Zimmerman, Spiritual Leader/Asst Treasurer at St. Vincent de Paul at St Rosalie Church, Long Island, NY
Sister Rosalie Carven, Sisters of St. Joseph Brentwood, Long Island, NY
Vicar Jean Dougherty, St. Andrew's Lutheran Church, Long Island, NY
Miriam Hirsch, Member at Temple Beth Torah, Long Island, NY
Linda Olson, Associate at Sisters of St. Joseph, Long Island, NY
Sister Margie Kelly, Parish Outreach Director, Holy Name of Mary Church, Long Island, NY
Rabbi Marcey Wagner, Chavurat Emet, Long Island, NY
Rabbi Ian Silverman, East Northport Jewish Center, Long Island, NY
Eileen Toomey, Member of Racial Reconciliation Ministry, St. John's Episcopal Church, Long Island, NY
Rev. Robert L. Pierce, Sayville Congregational United Church of Christ, Long Island, NY
Erik Rasmussen, Chairperson at Long Island Council of Churches Long Island, NY
Rabbi Lina Nancy Zerbarini, Kehillath Shalom Synagogue, Long Island, NY
Rev. Ned Wight, Church of the Larger Fellowship (UU), Long Island, NY
Sister Karen Burke, CSJ, Leadership Council, Sisters of St. Joseph, Brentwood NY
Donna Herrington, Associate at Sisters of St. Joseph, Long Island, NY
Rabbi Paul Sidlofsky, Temple Isaiah, Long Island, NY
Sister Elizabeth Hill, Sisters of St. Joseph, Long Island, NY
Mrs. Anne Cimino, Roman Catholic, Long Island, NY
Dr. Michael Chlystun, Smithtown Anti-Bias Task Force, Long Island, NY
Sister Mary E. Moore, SC, Executive Director at Centro Corazon de Maria, Long Island, NY
Claire Deroche, Chair of Public Issues Committee of the LI Council of Churches, Long Island, NY
Mary Dewar, Member of the Worship Committee, Garden City Community Church, Long Island, NY
Sadri Altinok, President at Turkish Cultural Center, Long Island, NY
Rev. Ashley McFaul-Erwin, Setauket Presbyterian Church, Long Island, NY
Rabbi Jeffrey Clopper, Temple Beth El of Huntington, Long Island, NY

For questions about this memorandum of support, please contact Fund Excluded Workers Campaign Manager Nishat Tabassum (nishat.tabassum@maketheroadny.org).

