

March 24, 2023

Governor Gavin Newsom
1021 O Street, Suite 9000
Sacramento, CA, 95814

Re: Historic Winter Storms and Undocumented Immigrant Communities

Dear Governor Newsom,

We, the undersigned 40 leaders from immigrant, economic, social and environmental justice organizations across the state of California, **urge you to create a state program to provide critical unemployment benefits to workers in California who are ineligible to receive Unemployment Insurance** due to their immigration status. Climate-induced disasters continue to threaten and disproportionately impact low-income immigrant communities. For all Californians to be resilient and protected from future extreme weather events, the state should expand access to unemployment benefits and build a long-term infrastructure to distribute support to the community, rather than rely on piecemeal, one-time relief.

In January, severe storms flooded the entire town of Planada. Less than three months later, the town of Pajaro is facing the same devastation. Residents of both towns are primarily low-income, and many are undocumented. Their homes, crops, and jobs are gone, and may not be restored for weeks, months, or longer. They have been left with little to no recourse to shoulder the economic impacts of these climate-induced disasters, which are becoming more frequent and severe. Without access to unemployment benefits, disasters force them to exhaust any savings they may have, accumulate debt, and struggle to afford food and housing.

The need for change is not limited to workers in these towns. Ruined crops do not only affect farmworkers, but workers in industries across California that are interconnected to our agricultural production, such as trucking, warehousing, retail, and manufacturing.

Nor are the crises in California's immigrant communities today natural, but a result of decades of policymaking that have both targeted and marginalized undocumented migrant workers, making them more vulnerable to the state's propensity for major public disasters.

And while California winter storms are at the forefront today, these events are part of a much deeper problem. Last year, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) classified the risk of the impact of natural disasters on communities as at least "relatively moderate" in fifty-two of the state's fifty-eight counties.¹ No other state in the nation experiences such widespread and elevated risk across its counties.

History has shown us that California undocumented immigrant workers live in some of the hardest hit communities, and that a long-term solution is needed immediately. In the past three years, the

¹ UC Merced Community and Labor Center, March 2022, "Essential Fairness: The Case for Unemployment Benefits for California's Undocumented Immigrant Workers," <https://clc.ucmerced.edu/sites/clc.ucmerced.edu/files/documents/essential-fairness.pdf>

state has experienced a global pandemic, record heat, drought, catastrophic wildfires, and floods, and yet the historical record demonstrates remarkable predictability of these events. Instead of relying solely on disaster relief as a stop-gap measure, California should invest in infrastructure to better support families, communities, and industries to withstand the long-standing issues with, and the accelerating prevalence of, economic and environmental volatility.

Unemployment benefits are a lifeline for California’s families, communities and industries during major public disasters. According to the LAO, unemployment benefits not only help alleviate temporary economic hardship for workers and their families, but also bolster the state economy during economic downturns.² Unemployment benefits also help prevent the sort of desperation among job seekers that allows unscrupulous employers to commit wage theft and perpetuate other forms of harassment or mistreatment on the job.³ Moreover, they support industries and the economy by making sure that those who lose work can keep spending money with local businesses and can get back to work once a job becomes available.⁴

California already benefits greatly from contributions made by undocumented workers, who contribute 3.7 billion dollars in state and local taxes annually. California employers contribute 485 million dollars to the UI system on behalf of undocumented workers’ labor, even though these workers don’t see a cent of the benefits.⁵ It is past time for the state to acknowledge their centrality to the economy by creating a benefit that serves them in times of crisis.

Unemployment benefits are needed now to prepare for a volatile future. Unemployment benefits for undocumented workers would ensure that California’s most marginalized workers, including farmworkers in Planada and Pajaro, have a financial safety net in the face of environmental and economic disasters. We cannot keep scrambling for resources every time undocumented immigrant workers are at the forefront of disaster. **We strongly urge you to include unemployment benefits for undocumented workers in the 2023-2024 state budget. We respectfully ask for you to meet with Coalition members in person in the coming weeks to discuss this critical program.** It is the equitable and inclusive approach we need for current community members and for future generations.

Sincerely,

² Legislative Analyst’s Office, September 28, 2022, “LAO Report Overview: California’s Unemployment Insurance Program,” https://lao.ca.gov/handouts/state_admin/2022/UI-Report-Overview-092822.pdf

³ David Dyssegaard Kallick, Andrew Stettner, Ashleigh-Ann Sutherland, and Samantha Wing, September 7, 2022, “Providing Unemployment Insurance to Immigrants and Other Excluded Workers: A State Roadmap for Inclusive Benefits,” <https://tcf.org/content/report/providing-unemployment-insurance-to-immigrants-and-other-excluded-workers-a-state-roadmap-for-inclusive-benefits/>

⁴ Alissa Anderson, August 2021, “Q&A: Unemployment Insurance, Labor Day Cliff & the Costs of Unemployment,” <https://calbudgetcenter.org/resources/qa-unemployment-insurance-labor-day-cliff-the-costs-of-unemployment/>

⁵ UC Merced Community and Labor Center, December 2022, “Worker Relief: Expanding the Safety Net to Excluded Workers,” https://clc.ucmerced.edu/sites/clc.ucmerced.edu/files/page/documents/worker_relief_2022_1.pdf



Carlos Amador
Coalition Director, Safety Net for All Coalition



Alejo
Executive Director, Trabajadores Unidos
Workers United



Sheheryar Y. Kaoosji
Executive Director, Warehouse Workers
Resource Center



Angelica Salas,
Executive Director, Coalition for Humane
Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles



Cynthia Buiza
Executive Director, California Immigrant
Policy Center



Salvador Sarmiento
Campaign Director, National Day Labor
Organizing Network



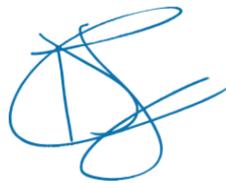
Javier Hernandez
Executive Director, Inland Coalition for
Immigrant Justice



Sarait Martinez, Ed.D.
Executive Director, Centro Binacional para el
Desarrollo Indígena Oaxaqueño



Andrea Gonzalez
Organizing Director, CLEAN Carwash
Center



Diego Cartagena, Esq.
President & CEO, Bet Tzedek



Lucas Zucker
Co-Executive Director, Central Coastal
Alliance United for A Sustainable Economy



Tia Orr
Executive Director, SEIU California



Hazel Davalos,
Co-Executive Director, Central Coastal
Alliance United for A Sustainable Economy



Devon Gray
President, End Poverty in California



Vanessa Terán
Mixteco Indigena Community Organizing
Project



Eder Gaona-Macedo, MPA
Executive Director, 805UndocuFund



Daniela Urban
Executive Director, Center for Workers'
Rights



Ana Rosa Rizo-Centino

Ana Rosa Centino
Network Manager, Central Coast Climate
Justice Network



Armando Gudino
Executive Director, Los Angeles Worker
Center Network



Alexandra Morales
Director of Organizing, Policy, and
Advocacy, Central American Resource
Center



Victor Narro
Project Director, UCLA Labor Center



Najayara Valdovinos Soto
Executive Director, Inland Empire Immigrant
Youth Collective



Shimica Gaskins
President & CEO, GRACE/End Child
Poverty CA



Kim Ouillette
Staff Attorney, Legal Aid at Work



Max Bell Alper
Director, North Bay Jobs with Justice



Maria Cadenas, MBA
Executive Director, Ventures



Jenna Gerry
Senior Staff Attorney, National Employment
Law Project



Tanya Broder
Senior Staff Attorney, National Immigration
Law Center



Fanelly Millan
Inland Empire Organizer, Pomona Economic
Opportunity Center



Karín Umfrey
Senior Staff Attorney, Worksafe



Maria Elena de la Garza
Executive Director, Community Action Board
of Santa Cruz County



Anna Hasselblad
Director of Public Policy, United Ways of
California



Luz Gallegos
Executive Director, TODEC Legal Center



Kevan Andrea Insko
Director, Friends Committee on Legislation
of California



Becky Silva
Director of Government Relations, CA
Association of Food Banks



Erik Garcia
Organizing and Program Manager, Long
Beach Immigrant Rights Coalition



Jesus Martinez, Ph.D.
Executive Director, Central Valley Immigrant
Integration Collaborative



Mary Igantius
Statewide Organizer, Parent Voices



Joseph Tomás Mckellar
Executive Director
PICO California



Christopher Sanchez
Policy Advocate
Western Center on Law and Poverty