

EXCLUDED NO MORE

Unemployment System for Excluded Immigrant Workers

When the unexpected happens and we experience job loss, we should all still be able to feed our families, clothe our kids and keep a roof over our heads. Every worker - no matter how much they make, or their immigration status - deserves the peace of mind of unemployment insurance if they lose their job. **But here in Washington state, our current unemployment system excludes certain workers solely because of their immigration status.**

Today, undocumented workers who've called WA home for decades have no access to unemployment insurance, although they too pay into the UI system through their labor. Thousands of immigrant workers play a pivotal role in keeping our communities going, and yet their exclusion from unemployment benefits leaves them without the support we all deserve as Washingtonians.

For workers, lack of basic jobless assistance can mean a vicious cycle of poverty and hardship for them and their families, and a migration to another industry or another location to look for immediate work. For employers, it can mean starting from scratch when looking to rehire as the economy improves. It is time to correct these faults in this critical system, so that when the next economic downturn happens all Washington workers, including excluded immigrant workers, and the businesses that need them, are as resilient as they can be. **You have a unique opportunity to make Washington a welcoming, pro-immigrant leader by passing HB 1095/SB 5109 to expand our social safety net to include everyone.**

CASE FOR SUPPORT

- **Contributions:** Undocumented workers have paid more than \$400 million in contributions to the state and federal unemployment trust fund over the past ten years--programs they themselves are not eligible for.
- **Inequity:** Unemployed WA workers who are U.S. Citizens have been eligible for an average of \$43,000 in unemployment payments during the pandemic. Meanwhile, undocumented and other immigrant workers are currently excluded from any form of unemployment insurance.
- **Job loss:** Ineligibility for unemployment has devastated immigrant communities during the pandemic economic crisis. Industries that experienced the highest rates of job loss in WA due to the pandemic are also low-wage sectors with the highest numbers of immigrant workers including the restaurant, hotel, retail, and construction industries.
- **Impact:** Without access to unemployment, among other critical safety net programs, Washington's immigrant communities face deep economic devastation for years to come. Prior to the pandemic, the poverty rate of immigrants in WA was already high, with 18% of the state's immigrant residents living in poverty compared to 12% of U.S.-born residents.

BILL HIGHLIGHTS

- **Benefits:** Same as regular UI for those deemed eligible
- **Agency & Funding:** Employment Security Division through supplemental general fund
- **Eligibility:** People who have lost employment and are unable to access regular unemployment benefits due to immigration status
- **Application:** Through regular UI portal and then additional support with the department Community-Based Organizations to finish application and provide wage/hour documentation. Final details are to be determined during rulemaking and implementation with the support of an advisory committee.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Privacy
- Ease & Accessibility
- Government Administered
- Avoids Public Charge

HB 1095
SB 5109