

October 6, 2021

The Honorable Charles Schumer
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Leader Schumer and Speaker Pelosi:

The undersigned organizations write in enthusiastic support of The Unemployment Insurance Improvement Act (UIIA), introduced by Senator Wyden on September 27, 2021, and ask that it be included in the Build Back Better legislation that Congress is currently considering.

The unemployment insurance program has been a lifeline for over [53 million workers](#) during the ongoing COVID crisis, but this time of crisis has only spotlighted the longstanding inadequacies of the outdated program.

Because of severe shortcomings in the state programs, Congress had to enact emergency pandemic programs to offset the barriers to eligibility, too-short benefit durations, and inadequate benefit levels that keep millions of workers in good economic times or bad from having the support they need when experiencing job loss. The effects of the unemployment insurance program's shortcomings disproportionately fall on Black, Latinx, and other workers of color as confirmed in a recent [GAO report](#).

When Congress and the Administration let the emergency pandemic programs expire, over [9 million workers](#) lost benefits entirely and were left with no support as they continue to try to find work and deal with ongoing health issues and caregiving responsibilities. This is unacceptable.

Congress must take the first steps to permanently reform the UI system so that it functions for all workers in good economic times as well as times of crisis. It is absolutely unacceptable for Congress to pass and the Administration to sign the Build Back Better legislation without including provisions that begin the important task of reforming this essential program which fails to adequately help too many workers when they lose their jobs, especially workers of color.

The Unemployment Insurance Improvement Act provides for well-targeted reforms that address the longstanding inequities in the program that block workers of color, immigrants, and women from being able to access unemployment insurance:

- **Mandatory Alternative Base Period (ABP):** It will require states to calculate unemployment insurance (UI) eligibility using an Alternative Base Period (ABP), which looks at the last completed quarter of earnings for those not eligible under a standard base period (first four of the last five completed quarters).

Underpaid workers (those in the bottom quartile of all earners) make up over 58 percent of all those who need the ABP to qualify for UI. Furthermore, both Black and Latinx workers are more than 1.5 times more likely than white workers to need the ABP for their monetary eligibility for unemployment benefits.

- **At Least 26 Weeks of Benefits:** It will require that all states have a minimum duration of 26 weeks of regular UI benefits at all times. After the Great Recession, ten states cut their duration of UI benefits below 26 weeks and more are threatening to do so now. Black workers are particularly hurt by shorter durations given their average unemployment duration is 25.9 weeks compared to 19 weeks for white workers.
- **Coverage for Part-Time Workers:** It will require that states provide UI coverage for part-time workers. Part-time workers, who are especially likely to be working women and individuals with disabilities, too often fall through the cracks of UI in most states because of overly restrictive eligibility requirements.

This bill would ensure UI claimants could seek part-time work (rather than only full-time employment) when receiving UI benefits, and it would set a minimum amount of part-time wages to be excluded from UI benefit calculations (one third of an individual's weekly benefit amount) in order to allow workers to accept part-time work without losing their UI benefits entirely.

- **Lowering the Earnings Requirement:** Finally, the bill will limit the past wages required for UI eligibility. States generally require a certain amount of earned wages in at least two quarters of the workers base period for an individual to be eligible for UI. Higher wage requirements hurt those with underpaid, part-time and intermittent work. The UIIA would require eligibility after \$1500 of wages in the base period (and \$1000 in the high quarter).

These four targeted reforms are an important step in making the program work for all workers and can lay the groundwork for further reform of this vital program.

Anything less than this is a betrayal of the workers who need this program in order to ensure that they have economic security between jobs, and a particular betrayal of workers of color who have more precarious job security than white workers as a result of systemic racism.

Sincerely,

AFL-CIO

Alianza Nacional de Campesinas

American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)

American Federation of Teachers

Arizona Center for Economic Progress

Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families

Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO

Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network

Bet Tzedek Legal Services
CASH CAMPAIGN OF MARYLAND
Center for Disability Rights
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Center for LGBTQ Economic Advancement & Research (CLEAR)
Center for Popular Democracy
Center for Survivor Agency and Justice
Center for Worker Justice of Eastern Iowa
Chicago Jobs Council
Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organizations
Coalition on Human Needs
Colorado Fiscal Institute
DC KinCare Alliance
Department for Professional Employees, AFL-CIO
Domestic Violence Legal Empowerment and Appeals Project
Economic Opportunity Institute
Economic Policy Institute
Economic Progress Institute
Employ America
Equal Rights Advocates
Every Texan
ExtendPUA.org
Faith in Public Life
Family Equality
Fenway Health
Florida Legal Services, Inc.
Florida Policy Institute
FORGE, Inc.
Freedom Network USA
Fund for Community Reparations for Autistic People of Color's Interdependence, Survival, & Empowerment
Fund Our Future
Greater Boston Legal Services
Groundwork Action
Hispanic Federation
Independent Workforce Development Consultant
Indiana Institute for Working Families
International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE)
Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence
Jewish Women International
Jobs With Justice
Justice At Work
Kentucky Center for Economic Policy
Kentucky Coalition Against Domestic Violence
Kentucky Equal Justice Center
Keystone Research Center

Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
Legal Aid Justice Center
Legal Aid of Marin
Los Angeles LGBT Center
Louisiana Budget Project
Lovelace Consulting Services, Inc.
Maine AFL-CIO
Maine Center for Economic Policy
Maine Equal Justice
Maine People's Alliance
Make the Road Nevada
MANA, A National Latina Organization
Metro New York Health Care for All
Michigan Immigrant Rights Center
Michigan League for Public Policy
Missouri Jobs with Justice
Mon Valley Unemployed Committee
Montana Women Vote
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF)
National Association of Social Workers
National Black Justice Coalition
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Coalition Against Domestic Violence
National Consumers League
National Council of Jewish Women
National Education Association
National Employment Lawyers Association
National Employment Law Project
National Network to End Domestic Violence
National Organization for Women
National Partnership for Women & Families
National Resource Center on Domestic Violence
National Skills Coalition
National Urban League
National Women's Law Center
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
North Carolina Justice Center
Northwest Workers' Justice Project
Ohio Association of Foodbanks
Ohio Domestic Violence Network
Ohio Organizing Collaborative
Ohio Poverty Law Center
One Pennsylvania
Paralyzed Veterans of America
Pennsylvania Budget and Policy Center

People's Action
People's Parity Project
Philadelphia Unemployment Project
Philadelphia Drivers Unio
Policy Matters Ohio
Policy Matters Ohio
Poligon Education Fund
Public Justice Center
R2H Action [Right to Health]
Restaurant Opportunities Centers United
RESULTS DC/MD
Rights & Democracy - NH & VT
Safe Harbor Law, LLC
Shriver Center on Poverty Law
Sojourners
Step up Louisiana
Texas AFL-CIO
The 99% Pennsylvania campaign
The National Black Worker Center
The National Domestic Violence Hotline
TIME'S UP
Transport Workers Union of America
Ujima, Inc.: The National Center on Violence Against Women in the Black Community
Unemployed Workers United
Unemployment Law Project
Union for Reform Judaism
United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries
Utahns Against Hunger
Victor Forberger, Esq.
Voices for Progress
William E. Morris Institute for Justice (Arizona)
Women Employed
Women's Law Project
Working Washington
Workplace Fairness
Workplace Justice Project at Loyola Law Clinic