



COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
THE JOHN A. WILSON BUILDING
1350 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE, NW
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20004

The Honorable Phil Mendelson
Chairman, Council of the District of Columbia
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20004

May 6, 2022

Dear Chairman Mendelson,

As the Councilmembers who represent the highest numbers of residents considered “Excluded Workers,” we are particularly pained that the Fiscal Year 2023 budget retrenches exclusion from assistance for more than 15,000 residents hardest hit by the Coronavirus pandemic. In the last two budget cycles, you have been able to secure last-minute infusions of funds for the excluded worker community and we are asking you to do so once more this year.

Being an excluded worker means being unable to receive any of the public benefits or stimulus payments that involve federal funding. Unemployment insurance *alone* buoyed District workers – both traditionally classified employees and self-employed workers who are also typically excluded from the Unemployment Compensation system – with \$34,000, on average, in just one year of the pandemic.¹ Those workers were later able to use unemployment insurance approval notices to apply for rental assistance from STAY DC to erase arrears. There was no safety net for Excluded Workers at the onset of the pandemic until the Council stepped in. We’re proud of the Council’s leadership on this front in 2020 and 2021 but there is still a \$500 million difference between various forms of pandemic support for excluded versus non-excluded workers.

The current request from the excluded worker coalition is \$160 million to replenish funds for the DC Cares program. This represents a modest \$12,000/person cash assistance payment to reduce the burden of more than 2 full years of lost wages, out-of-pocket COVID medical bills and precautionary supplies, increased food and utility costs with more family members home, and various other additional expenses. We recognize the difficulty in funding an ask of this magnitude with so many competing priorities. Still, matching last year’s investment in DC Cares with \$41 million would be a tremendous reflection of our city’s racial equity values and our commitment to remaining a sanctuary city.

¹ [Excluded Workers Demand Inclusion: \\$200 Million Investment is Essential Though Less than Half of What’s Needed](#)

The combined local and federal assistance for our traditional workers has helped prevent thousands of District residents from falling further into poverty. The same cannot be said of residents considered excluded workers. We have heard from numerous constituents about the financial tailspin and mental health challenges they faced when they lost jobs, lost hours, lost child care, and lost loved ones. We have also heard from many about their continued difficulties returning to the labor market with job options limited for excluded workers: despite wanting to work, when an excluded worker does not have proper documentation or formal work histories to credential themselves for a position, they are at a unique disadvantage in hiring.

For too many excluded workers in our wards, the pandemic is still far from over. This is made clear in the attached memo from Platform of Hope profiling excluded worker constituent needs in Ward 1 – a snapshot of the hardships others across the city face. While we cannot make these working families whole, any assistance will help ensure they are on a path to recovery along with the rest of our constituents.

We join with excluded workers – our neighbors, our community leaders, the parents of children attending our local schools, cooks and servers in our local restaurants, street vendors striving to earn a living by the means available to them – to urge you to do everything in your power as you finalize your budget proposal to find funding to stabilize the District’s community of excluded workers. Thank you for your partnership in ensuring a strong and equitable recovery for all.

Sincerely,



Janeese Lewis George
Councilmember, Ward 4



Brianne K. Nadeau
Councilmember, Ward 1



THE NEED:

Families need emergency rent + utilities assistance– AGAIN*: 51% of POH families received rental assistance last year and yet in April 2022, 38% reported they were currently in need of rental assistance.

“What are your goals this month” (sample excerpts)-- people want to work! *

- *So right now I am working a part time job it has been a big help with bills. So I just been looking for other part time jobs that will work around my schedule .*
- *My goal is to get another part time job.* My income alone can't support us. I'm hoping that I can get a new used car for transportation. I need a car to find a job in Maryland.
- *I want to work on saving and money management and in order to do that I need to be going back to work full time so I can provide for my children and stop struggling*
- *The goals I've been working on is my credit, savings, housing...*
- *Goals have included paying of some debts and finding stable work. My goals are also to find a better solution to help my mother and her illness. Making sure my kids and I are stable is a constant goal*
- *For the last couple of months I have been working on getting and maintaining a job looking for more work and trying to find a place to live by so me and my child will have to move and its not easy trying to find a safe place to move to so over the next couple of months that will be much main goal looking for a place to call home*
- *I am going to take more classes at Carlos Rosario Public Charter School and work on my finances. I need to save money for a house and college.*
- *My goals that's I've set for the next couple of months will be Moving into my new apartment having a healthy and safe delivery and getting back into work*
- *Finding stable work and to be able to maintain my bills each month.* Also to make sure my mother is stable as well. I just need time to be able to get the info that I need to process what I need to do
- *I focus my goal this time developed my credit score and minimize my expense and saved money and also check everything*
- *Pay on time all credit card and check*
- *Financial Literacy And scholarship because I just been focusing on working and my mother but I do wanna go back to school and work on OT. Also want to learn how to take care of some one who had stroke so wanna do like research on that.*

And these are just SOME of the responses.

The bottom line: Families are motivated, families are hardworking and they deserve an economic investment to help them pay off debts, support the costs of childcare, transportation + healthcare that keep them from working and to ensure they have stable housing. **For excluded workers**, they are trying to restart their lives with only \$3,300 in public support over the past **two years** as opposed to over **\$40,000** received for folks who got unemployment insurance + the federal stimulus.

Could you live on only \$1,500 a year in DC? Why must they?

*Note about source of data: POH tracks families' progress within the program through quarterly journals, which are used also to gather quantitative information regarding the many COVID-pandemic issues such as ratings on financial status, employment status, vaccination, etc. **Please check with Judy Estey at jestey@platformofhopedc.org before publicly using this data**

Why Economic Investment in Excluded Workers is Needed Right NOW

[The Platform of Hope](#) works with economically vulnerable Black and brown families primarily based in Ward 1, Washington, DC. Many families (an estimated 25%) are excluded workers due to their immigration status and type of work (ex. members of the informal economy). Families are working hard to recover from the many overlapping challenges from the pandemic– and the biggest thing we hear is their desire to return to work. However, as shown in the articles cited below (that POH collaborated on) and in the following excerpts from journals we collect from families, **there are so many disparities facing families– particularly excluded workers- in trying to maintain a consistent work schedule:**

1. Lack of childcare for parents to return to work while their kids are out of school:

A single father of four kids, which includes a set of twins, Hugo might normally rely on his eldest, 15, to help take care of the others, but she has developmental disabilities. So instead, he pays a sitter. “Almost everything goes to [the nanny],” he said. “What I save isn’t anything. I have to pay rent. I have to pay her.” - [“Undocumented parents have weathered a pandemic with no safety net.”](#) *Washington Post*, February 10, 2022

2. For restaurant workers, lunch rush has not returned– so whereas before, parents in food service sectors could work lunch hours while kids were in school, now they only work evening hours and have to pay for childcare/find childcare since their kids are home. Finding last minute childcare with part-time, in-flux shift scheduling is also a significant burden in this recovery period.

“Many daytime service jobs still haven’t returned, so Alejandra and Alberto work evenings. But with their daughter back in school, evenings are also the only time they have with her.” - [“Undocumented parents have weathered a pandemic with no safety net.”](#) *Washington Post*, February 10, 2022

3. The inequitable rate that Black and brown families have in contracting COVID due to exposure, often from their frontline jobs - contracting COVID means quarantining, hospitalization, long haul symptoms, and unfortunately, death, leading to higher medical costs, funeral expenses, lost hours and earnings, and, sometimes, needing to leave the workforce to care for a family member or spare COVID risks to vulnerable or immunocompromised family members.

“The COVID death disparities across race and ethnicity in the District are deeper than national rates. The cumulative age-adjusted COVID fatality rate for Blacks in D.C. is 3.6 times higher than Whites as of April 6. For LatinX residents in the District, the death rate is 4.7 times higher than White residents...”- [“COVID-19 Cases Continue to Rise in D.C.”](#) *Washington City Paper*, April 15, 2022.

4. Disparate **financial** impact when families contract COVID: When families have someone who contracts COVID and they work outside the home, it means they have to stay home and **forgo shifts** (this is true particularly for gig economy and undocumented workers who don’t receive sick leave); because, too often, they’re living in small spaces, it is almost impossible to quarantine so everyone else in the household gets sick as well. This leads to an even longer period of time that families are out of work–**one person getting COVID could mean a month of lost wages.**

“But fatalities are not the only disparate impacts of COVID. ‘We’re ... evolving into a society where class is partly measured by, like, do you have to leave your house or not in order to go to work,’ Judy Estey, executive director of Platform of Hope, told City Paper in February. **Street vendors and domestic workers are particularly susceptible to contracting COVID and to lost wages.**” [“COVID-19 Cases Continue to Rise in D.C.”](#) *Washington City Paper*, April 15, 2022.