

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during the ongoing COVID crisis, but this time of crisis has only spotlighted the longstanding inadequacies of the outdated program.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