

Long Island Business NEWS

libn.com



AP photo by Jae C. Hong

Touting economic boost, advocates push to extend Excluded Worker Fund

By: [David Winzelberg](#), January 24, 2022

The state's \$2.1 billion Excluded Worker Fund provided a significant economic boost to Long Island and other regions of the state, according to a new report from the Immigration Research Initiative, which is lobbying to extend the fund.

Last year, the fund, managed by the state's Department of Labor, provided unemployment compensation to 130,000 workers, mostly undocumented New Yorkers left out of both pandemic unemployment assistance, regular unemployment insurance and stimulus checks.

More than 99 percent of workers who received funds got \$15,600, an amount on a par with what others received in unemployment benefits. Nearly 15,000 workers benefited on Long Island, with a boost to the local economy of about \$224 million, according to the report.

The state allocated funding to nonprofit groups to ensure that everyone who qualified could apply. Long Island, which is home to 12 percent of the state's undocumented workers, saw 11 percent of the 2021's beneficiaries, the report found.

The Fund Excluded Worker coalition has called for adding \$3 billion to the Excluded Worker Fund this year to ensure that people who qualify aren't denied support because they didn't apply before last

year's funds were exhausted. Immigration Research Initiative estimates that an added \$3 billion would allow the state to reach an additional 170,000 workers who experienced loss of work between Feb. 2020 and April 2021 would be able to receive benefits.

Advocates for workers living illegally in the U.S. and lacking federal COVID assistance have been critical of Gov. Kathy Hochul for not yet extending the Excluded Worker Fund.

"If Gov. Hochul truly wants to make history, she'll make New York the first state in the country to open the safety net to excluded workers — for good," Fund Excluded Workers coalition coordinator Bianca Guerrero said earlier this month.

If the fund is replenished, the report said that an additional 22,000 people on Long Island who lost work and were excluded from other unemployment benefits would receive Excluded Worker Fund benefits with a total direct economic boost to the region of \$346 million.

"Replenishing the fund would be only fair to New Yorkers who lost work during the worst of the recession but still have seen no aid. And it would be a boost to local economies that are still struggling to get back on track," David Dyssegaard Kallick, director of Immigration Research Initiative, said in a written statement. "Replenishing the fund would also be a win for regional equity, giving upstate areas and Long Island a chance to catch up in helping workers who qualify to apply."

Adrian Fassett, CEO of Economic Opportunity Council of Suffolk, which was one of the nonprofits that was contracted by the state to administer the fund, would also like to see it extended.

"Most excluded workers pay income taxes and perform work that's considered essential in the battle against COVID," Fassett said via email. "They deserve equal access to wages lost because of the pandemic. Americans believe in fair play and fair pay, and it's unfair to exclude these workers from benefits because they lack documentation."

###