

OUR New York – Why Reform NY State’s UI system?

“I lost my job.” These are some of the hardest words for any family to hear. Yet, joblessness is a fact of life for working people throughout New York State, from a fast changing economy in New York City to the deindustrializing regions in Western New York.

New York working families should be able to count on Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits as a first responder to economic distress. Now more than ever, UI is needed to protect New Yorkers from the risks of a 21st century economy, while enabling them to seize new economic opportunities.

For too long, the UI system has deteriorated. Fewer than half of the unemployed receive assistance, and when workers do qualify the benefits provided are a shadow of workers former salaries. To make matters worse, the system discourages workers from seeking training that might improve their employment prospects.

Working families are the engine of our economy, yet face stagnant wages and a high cost of living, including increasing health care and housing costs. After contributing so much, New Yorkers have earned better treatment than they currently get from the unemployment insurance program. Improving unemployment insurance benefits is one crucial way that New York can reclaim its reputation as a state that respects the dignity and contributions of working people.

OUR New York – Reform Demands

OUR New York is a statewide coalition of community, worker, immigrant, policy and legal organizations as well as public interest advocates and labor unions committed to renewing this crucial and under-appreciated safety net. We are organizing around 4 key rallying points:

- *Meaningful income support for temporarily unemployed families.* New York’s maximum UI benefit has been stuck at \$405 since 1998. As a result, New York’s UI benefits replace a smaller share of wages than 48 of the 50 states. The maximum benefits—and the calculation for lower earning workers—must be raised.
- *Opportunities for jobless workers looking to advance their careers through training.* New York’s 599 program allows jobless workers to extend their unemployment benefits if they are approved for a training program. Workers rarely get this benefit because the program is limited to \$20 million per year and administered with overly strict rules. The program budget must be expanded and improved.
- *Improved access for immigrant workers.* Non-English speakers face barriers at every level of the system, from calling in for benefits, filling out forms to defending their rights at hearings. DOL must keep it promises to provide adequate translation services to immigrant workers seeking UI.
- *Expand eligibility for workers at educational institutions.* Adjuncts, teachers aides, food service, maintenance, and other hourly workers employed by educational institutions are unfairly disqualified between two school terms from receiving UI for the time that they are laid off. These workers should be deemed laid off and eligible for UI.

OUR New York will work on other UI issues, such as improving UI eligibility rules for crucial populations like temp agency workers and families balancing work and family. We also will advocate to improve the administration of the program by Department of Labor and its UI appeal board.

OUR New York – Signing On

If you share our commitment to supporting working families through a reinvigorated UI system, we ask you to sign on to OUR New York. Coordinated by the New York Unemployment Project, OUR New York is committed to a long-term process of reforming our state’s UI program. OUR New York will bring our shared voices to policy makers and the media, achieving key changes in the system.

Partial List of endorsing organizations: (Underlined organizations have pledged coalition membership)

<u>American Federation of Musicians Local 802</u>	<u>New York City Employment & Training Coalition</u>
<u>Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund</u>	<u>New York Immigration Coalition</u>
<u>Buffalo Building and Construction Trades Council</u>	<u>New York Jobs with Justice</u>
<u>Buffalo Central Labor Council</u>	<u>New York State AFL-CIO</u>
<u>Catholic Charities of Tompkins/Tioga</u>	<u>New York State Episcopal Public Policy Network</u>
<u>Cattaraugus-Alleghany Central Labor Council</u>	<u>New York State Labor and Religion Coalition</u>
<u>Citizen Action New York</u>	<u>New York Unemployment Project</u>
<u>Communication Workers of America – District 1</u>	<u>Niagara-Orleans Central Labor Council</u>
<u>Community Legal Resource Network, CUNY School of Law</u>	<u>Northern Manhattan Coalition for Immigrant</u>
<u>Cornell Organization for Labor Action</u>	<u>Office and Professional Employees International Union 277</u>
<u>Cornell Police Union</u>	<u>Part of the Solution (POTS)</u>
<u>Cornell Tzedek: Jewish Social Justice</u>	<u>Partnership for the Homeless</u>
<u>Cortland Workers’ Rights Board</u>	<u>Public Housing Residents of the Lower East Side</u>
<u>Dunkirk Central Labor Council</u>	<u>Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund</u>
<u>Education Support Professionals/Ithaca (Paraprofessionals)</u>	<u>Queens Federation of Churches</u>
<u>Empire Justice Center</u>	<u>Retail, Wholesale, and Department Store Union (RWDSU)</u>
<u>Farmworker Legal Services of New York</u>	<u>Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy</u>
<u>Fiscal Policy Institute</u>	<u>Social Justice Council of the First Unitarian Society of Ithaca</u>
<u>Good Ole Lower East Side</u>	<u>Tompkins County Health Care Task Force Tompkins County</u>
<u>Humanistic Judaism</u>	<u>Workers Center</u>
<u>Ithaca Catholic Worker</u>	<u>Tompkins-Cortland Building and Construction</u>
<u>Ithaca Democratic Socialists of America</u>	<u>Trades Council</u>
<u>Ithaca Health Alliance</u>	<u>UAW Local 2300</u>
<u>Jamestown Central Labor Council</u>	<u>UAW Region 9</u>
<u>Justice For All</u>	<u>UAW Region 9A</u>
<u>Lower East Side Community Labor Coalition</u>	<u>Unemployment Action Center</u>
<u>Make the Road By Walking</u>	<u>West New York American Labor Federation</u>
<u>Mason Tenders District Council of Greater New York</u>	<u>Workers Rights Law Center of New York</u>
<u>Midstate Central Labor Council</u>	<u>YKASEC – Empowering the Korean American</u>
<u>National Employment Law Project</u>	

Tear at perforation and fax to OUR New York, c/o NELP at 212-285-3044

OUR New York Pledge

I endorse OUR New York’s unemployment insurance (UI) reform agenda and stand ready to hold our elected officials and the Department of Labor accountable for making long-lasting changes to New York State’s UI system.

Contact Name: _____

Organization Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____ Email: _____