

October 24, 2023

The Honorable Ron Wyden
The Honorable Michael Bennet
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Donald Beyer
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Wyden, Senator Bennet, and Representative Beyer:

The undersigned organizations write in enthusiastic support of the Unemployment Insurance Modernization and Recession Readiness Act you are introducing. These reforms are an essential step to ensuring a more equitable unemployment insurance system that meets the needs of the modern workforce and economy.

Unemployment Insurance (UI) provides critical economic support to workers, their families and communities, and the U.S. economy. Yet, since its inception, it has failed to meet the needs of far too many jobless workers, particularly during economic downturns, and it continues to operate in much the same way it did when it was enacted in 1935. It is a program that was essentially built for predominantly white and male breadwinners, a construct that simply does not hold up for our modern workforce. This means Black workers, women workers, other workers of color, and disabled workers are disproportionately harmed and excluded from the program because Congress has failed to reform the system to meet their needs.

By failing to modernize the system, Congress must step in during recessions to enact temporary programs that fill in some of the largest gaps in the program. This puts pressure on already strained and under resourced state agencies having to enact new programs overnight and delays much-needed support going to workers and local economies. The pandemic only highlighted this unsustainable reality.

The Unemployment Insurance Modernization and Recession Readiness Act provides critical and long-overdue reforms that will ensure all workers and the nations' economy will be better equipped to withstand periods of unemployment, particularly during the next economic downturn. It does so by:

- **Modernizing the Extended Benefits (EB) Program:** The EB program makes additional weeks of UI benefits available in times of high unemployment but currently does not turn on rapidly enough or stay on long enough. The bill reforms the EB program to ensure the benefits turn on and off at appropriate times to meet the needs of workers, employers, and the economy.
- **Establishing federal standards on benefit adequacy, duration, and eligibility:** The bill will require states to provide at least 26 weeks of benefits, sets a minimum benefit amount to ensure benefits are sufficient for workers to afford necessities, and ensures states provide benefits to low-paid workers, part-time workers, and workers who must leave their jobs for compelling personal reasons, such as needing to care for a family member.

- **Creating a Job Seeker Allowance for individuals re-entering the labor market:** A jobseeker allowance would provide benefits to workers who are currently not covered by the UI system but are looking for jobs. This includes self-employed workers, recent graduates, formerly incarcerated workers, disabled workers, and parents and caregivers returning to the workforce.

Passing this bill is an important step in ensuring all workers have economic security when they are in between jobs and lays the groundwork for transforming the nation's unemployment insurance system to ensure all workers can thrive.

Sincerely,

A Better Balance
AFL-CIO
Alabama Arise
American Federation of Teachers
Americans for Democratic Action (ADA)
Anne Arundel County Food Bank, Inc.
Arizona Center for Economic Progress
Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence
Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE)
Blanchard & Walker PLLC
California Employment Lawyers Association
California Immigrant Policy Center
Care in Action
Caring Across Generations
CASH Campaign of Maryland
Catholic Charities Worcester County
Center for Law and Social Policy
Center for New York City Affairs at The New School
Center for Popular Democracy
Center for Workers' Rights
Chicago Jobs Council
Chinese for Affirmative Action
Claimant Advocacy Program, MWC
Coalition on Human Needs
Colorado Center on Law and Policy
Colorado Fiscal Institute
Community Change Action
Connecticut Legal Services
CRLA Foundation
Detroit Action
Economic Opportunity Institute
Economic Policy Institute
Equal Rights Advocates
Every Texan
Fish Potter Bolanos, P.C.

Florida Policy Institute
Food Research & Action Center
Fund Excluded Workers Coalition
Georgia Alliance to End Homelessness
Grand Canyon Institute
Greater Boston Legal Services
Greater Hartford Legal Aid
Hunger Free Vermont
Impact Fund
In The Public Interest
Indiana Community Action Poverty Institute
Jewish Women International
Jobs to Move America
Jobs With Justice
Kentucky Center for Economic Policy
Kentucky Equal Justice Center
Keystone Research Center
Kreitman Law, LLC
Legal Aid At Work
Legal Aid Justice Center
Long Island Cares, Inc. - The Harry Chapin Food Bank
Los Angeles Regional Food Bank
Maine Center for Economic Policy
Maine Equal Justice
Maine People's Alliance
Make the Road NJ
Michigan League For Public Policy
MomsRising
Mon Valley Unemployed Committee
Mountain State Justice, Inc.
NAACP
National Action Network
National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities
National Black Justice Coalition
National Center for Law and Economic Justice
National Council of Jewish Women
National Domestic Workers Alliance
National Education Association
National Employment Law Project
National Employment Lawyers Association
National Institute for Workers' Rights
National Network to End Domestic Violence
National Organization for Women
National Partnership for Women & Families
National Resource Center on Domestic Violence

National Women's Law Center
New Haven Legal Assistance Association
New Jersey Association on Correction
New Mexico Center on Law and Poverty
New Mexico Voices for Children
New York Communities for Change
New York Legal Assistance Group
NH Legal Assistance
North Carolina Justice Center
Oregon Food Bank
Oxfam America
Philadelphia Unemployment Project
Policy Matters Ohio
Prosperity Now
Public Citizen
Public Justice Center
Restaurant Opportunities Centers United
Safe Harbor Law, LLC
Santa Clara County Wage Theft Coalition
Service Employees International Union
Shriver Center on Poverty Law
Southern Maine Workers' Center
Sugar Law Center for Economic & Social Justice
Sur Legal Collaborative
Tahirih Justice Center
The National Domestic Violence Hotline
The New York Women's Foundation
Unemployment Law Project
Unemployed Workers United
Union for Reform Judaism
United for a Fair Economy
United Steelworkers (USW)
URGE: Unite for Reproductive and Gender Equity
Victor Forberger, Wisconsin atty
Virginia Poverty Law Center
Washington State Budget and Policy Center
West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy
William E. Morris Institute for Justice
Women Employed
Workplace Fairness
Workplace Justice Lab at Rutgers University
Workplace Justice Project at Loyola Law Clinic