

June 15, 2022

The Honorable Governor Philip D. Murphy Governor of
New Jersey
PO Box 001
Trenton, NJ 08625

The Honorable Senate President Nicholas P. Scutari
New Jersey Senate President
PO Box 099
Trenton, NJ 08625

The Honorable Assembly Speaker Craig J. Coughlin Speaker of
the General Assembly
PO Box 098
Trenton, NJ 08625

Dear Governor Murphy, Senate President Scutari, and Assembly Speaker Coughlin:

The remaining \$3 billion in federal aid funds and the record-breaking \$10.7 billion surplus in the state budget offer New Jersey a golden opportunity to do right by its essential workers.

Throughout the pandemic, workers who because of their jobs were at greater risk of infection from COVID-19 were exalted as essential workers and heroes. Such praise, however welcome, has done nothing to improve the material conditions of these workers' lives or to compensate them for the additional risks they endured. While many professional class workers were able to reduce their risk by working from home, essential workers could not take care of the ill from home, prepare and distribute food from home, or keep facilities clean and sanitized from home. When the risks of Covid-19 were not fully understood, when masks were unavailable or not yet recommended, when vaccinations were just a hope, essential workers showed up and performed the work that had to be done to keep society functioning.

Essential workers had to deal with the stress and anxiety of an unthinkable risk: contracting a deadly disease, and worse, passing it on to their families. Many essential workers did contract COVID-19 and while many recovered after a couple of days, some became gravely ill, others now suffer from long-COVID, and many died. This toll is not surprising given that essential workers sometimes had to work without adequate PPE or in environments where social distancing was impossible. The impact was felt disproportionately among New Jersey's working class and particularly among Black and Latinx/Hispanic residents and immigrants who were overrepresented in sectors with the highest risk.¹

Many essential workers also bore direct economic costs such as having to take unpaid time off to quarantine or recover from Covid-19, pay for treatment for Covid-19, or purchase their own personal protective equipment.

The moral case for providing hazard pay has only strengthened as essential workers have gone from

¹ New York Times, How America Lost One Million People (May 13, 2022), <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/05/13/us/covid-deaths-us-one-million.html>

being in physical peril to having their financial security imperiled by higher costs. Inflation is running at 40-year highs hitting indispensable items like food, electricity, and fuel particularly hard, with inflation in these areas running at double digit rates.² We cannot allow this one-two punch to further harm New Jersey's essential workers.

Essential workers deserve recognition, yet thus far they have been overlooked in New Jersey despite the \$6.2 billion in Fiscal Recovery Funds from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) which specifies hazard pay as a recommended allocation.³ New Jersey has approximately \$3 billion unallocated ARPA funds that must be committed by December 31, 2024.⁴ New Jersey's record-breaking surplus of at least \$10 billion also offers an opportunity to recognize workers through fair compensation.

Therefore, we propose that:

- Eligible workers meet the following requirements:
 - Workers who qualified for Phase 1a or 1b eligibility under the CDC's vaccine prioritization and workers not restricted or discouraged from working in-person under Governor Murphy's EO 107 who would not otherwise qualify under Phase 1a or 1b; and
 - Workers who performed at least 500 hours of in-person covered work from March 16, 2020 to May 7, 2021 when vaccines became widely available; and
 - Workers whose incomes are below 100% of the state's average annual wage for all occupations which is \$67,120.
- Eligible workers who worked full time receive \$1,000 and part time workers receive \$500.
- The program would be run on a first-come, first-served basis and the total allotment would be \$100 million.
- Workers be permitted to show a range of proof of eligible employment.

Multiple states have provided hazard pay to employees. Notably, Minnesota allocated \$500 million in hazard pay to an estimated 667,000 essential workers with payments of \$750.⁵ Puerto Rico allocated \$200 million to provide \$2,000 payments to essential workers.⁶ Connecticut has approved \$65 million in hazard pay: \$30 million to its essential private sector employees (\$1,000 for full-time and \$500 for part time

² Olivia Rockeman, Will Wade, and Michael Hirtzer, Why Inflation is Hitting American Households Like Never Before, Bloomberg (June 9, 2022),

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-06-09/gasoline-food-and-power-inflation-slam-us-households-and-it-could-get-worse#xj4y7vzkg>

³ SFRF Interim Final Rule (IFR) at 31 C.F.R. §35.6 (b),

<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2021-05-17/pdf/2021-10283.pdf>

⁴ New Jersey Governor's Disaster Recovery Office, Financial Summary by Federal Act (March 2022),

<https://gdro.nj.gov/tp/en/financial-analysis/financial-summary>; State of New Jersey, 2021 Recovery Plan Performance Report (August 2021),

https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/136/New-Jersey_2021-Recovery-Plan_SLT-3280.pdf

⁵ Brian Bakst, State preps for sign-up surge, MPR news (June 7, 2022),

<https://www.mprnews.org/story/2022/06/07/state-preps-for-signup-surge-for-pandemic-bonuses>

⁶ Disponible el programa de compensacion Premium Pay para trabajadores eligible, Departamento de Hacienda (Sept. 16, 2022),

<https://hacienda.pr.gov/sobre-hacienda/sala-de-prensa-virtual/comunicados-de-prensa/disponible-el-programa-de-compensacion-premium-pay-para-trabajadores-elegibles>

For The Many is a statewide coalition of more than 30 organizations working to expand funding for essential services and improve budget practices to meet current and future needs, especially for communities that have been historically marginalized.

workers)⁷ and \$35 million for state employees.⁸In New Jersey certain workers such as corrections officers, have recently received much higher compensation and state workers at institutions are working toward a similar goal of additional premium pay or increasing salaries by 8%.

We, the undersigned Labor Unions and Worker Advocates, urge you, on behalf of all New Jerseyans, to acknowledge the sacrifices made by essential workers by providing them with a hazard pay bonus. Thank you.

Respectfully,

Charles Wowkanech, President, NJ State AFL-CIO
Charles Hall Jr., President, RWDSU Local 108
Sam Ferraino, Jr., President UFCW Local 360
Harvey While, President, UFCW Local 1262
John Niccollai, Jr. UFCW Local 464A
Orlando Riley, Chairman/ATU NJ State Council
Doug Placa, Executive Director JNESO
Kevin Brown, Executive Vice President and NJ State Director, SEIU 32BJ
SEIU NJ State Council
Debbie White, RN and President, Health Professionals and Allied Employees (HPAE)
Sara Cullinane, Executive Director, Make the Road New Jersey
Nicole Rodriguez, Executive Director, New Jersey Policy Perspective (NJPP)
Amy Torres, Executive Director, New Jersey Alliance for Immigrant Justice (NJAIJ)
Sue Altman, Executive Director, New Jersey Working Families Party
Debra Coyle McFadden, Executive Director, NJ Work Environment Council
Louis Kimmel, Executive Director, New Labor

⁷ An act adjusting the state budget for the biennium ending June 30, 2023, concerning provisions related to revenue, school construction and other items to implement the state budget and authorizing and adjusting bonds of the state. HB [5506](#).

⁸ Keith M. Phaneuf, CT employee unions eyeing arbitration to secure pandemic pay, CT Mirror (May 24, 2022), <https://ctmirror.org/2022/05/24/ct-employee-unions-eyeing-arbitration-to-secure-pandemic-pay/>

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