My name is Merle Payne and I am the Co-Director of CTUL, a community organization in the Twin Cities that is fighting for racial, gender and economic justice. I am writing in support of HF 4611 (SF 4540), a bill to establish an emergency community relief grant program to support Minnesotans who fall through the gaps of federal stimulus grants, unemployment insurance, and other relief programs.

Centro de Trabajadores Unidos en Lucha (CTUL) focuses on deep leadership development with low-wage workers in the Twin Cities metro area. We have been reaching out to our base since the beginning of the pandemic to understand how COVID-19 and the economic crisis have impacted the community. Over 90% of the people we spoke with said that their families have lost some income (around 38% lost their jobs, 33% lost significant hours, and 20% lost income for the family as a spouse or another bread winner lost wages or hours). Over 70% of the workers we have spoken with said that they believe that they do not qualify for unemployment or other federal or state social safety networks. People want to respect the stay at home order because they recognize the need to protect the health of the community and their own health. But when there is no financial support and people are forced to make choices between buying food, paying rent, and paying for other basic needs, they are stuck in an impossible situation deciding between basic survival, and risking their health to go out and find other work. This legislation is incredibly important to not only low-wage workers in the Twin Cities, but for the health of the entire state.

Please see testimonies of some of our members below:

**Adriana Sandoval, Food service, Edina**

“My name is Adriana Sandoval, I live in the city of Minneapolis and I am the mother of 3 children. Like many people affected by coronavirus, neither my husband or I worked this month after losing my job at Fuddruckers, a restaurant in Edina. We don't know what we are going to do if this continues. My family and I have been affected like many others.

When my job closed down, they did not lay me off, and instead fired me because they are closing down the restaurant without giving me any notice. Now I don't have work and once this passes I will have to begin from scratch without federal benefits, without anything.

**Eric Willis, Catering and events, Minneapolis**

Eric Willis worked at Levy, a food catering company that operated at various events at the Target Center. Eric’s hours were slashed once the COVID-19 crisis hit and was permanently laid-off.

Not only is Eric out of work, but he also has a 7 year old son with severe asthma, making finding another job impossible without putting his family’s health at extreme risk.

Even though Eric has applied for benefits, he worries that it won’t be enough or that the federal and city aid packages won’t reach him. Even though Eric lives in Minneapolis, he worries that the Minneapolis Gap funding won’t cut it for him and his family.

**Ericka Castro, Hospitality Worker, Minneapolis**

My name is Ericka Castro and I’m a member of CTUL. I was working in a hotel in downtown Minneapolis when COVID-19 started and closed everything down. My job told me they’d send me the check for the hours I worked, but to this day I haven’t received anything.

I am very frustrated that they are not paying me. That check is supposed to cover my bills and buy food for my children. There are no jobs, there is no money for rent, the government aid is not reaching everyone. I feel discriminated against for being a person of color. I am the workforce for this economy, but in the end I receive nothing, I should have rights because I contribute a lot to this country.

I demand that rent and mortgages are canceled. It is time for the rich to pay us back what they have stolen from exploiting us and promising payments that never come.

**Leticia, Cleaning, Roseville, and Mayela, Cleaning, Minneapolis**

Leticia and Mayela, both CTUL members, are an example of how federal packages will NOT help the most vulnerable and the state of Minnesota must act now to ensure Leticia, Mayela and people like them are supported during this crisis!

Leticia cleans government buildings and is a subcontractor of another subcontractor and lost both her jobs, however she cannot file for unemployment. She has two daughters and is worried about how she will pay for rent and food.

Mayela and her husband are independent contractors in cleaning and have lost all their income to support them and their two kids. Like Leticia, she is concerned about paying for food and rent. She is frustrated because even though they are the backbone of the economy, when a crisis hits, there is no help for them.

Workers like Leticia are who make our economy strong, NOT corporations. We are calling on Minnesota to establish a fund for the most vulnerable communities in our state who do not qualify for the federal benefits that have been passed.

**Lourdes Rodríguez, Fast Food, Northeast Minneapolis**

It would help us a lot if this law was passed to expand federal benefits because we are many families who do not have work or money to provide even food or basic necessities, even harder the bills and rent. It’s very frustrating. Because we know while there’s no work, this law is a necessity, for our children more than anything.

**Rosa Garcia, Restaurant, Roseville**

All of us are affected by this virus. And we are left without work. If we don't work, we don't have money for food, bills, rent. And we don't have savings. There are seven of us in our household, four adults and three children. It is hard on the little kids. They don't understand that there isn't money to buy them things or to eat out. They don't understand why they can't go outside and play. They are also eating a lot being at home. We get food from the schools, it's good that we get that help, but sometimes it isn't enough. My husband, my teenage daughter, and I all work in the same restaurant, and it has shut down. My daughter just turned 18, she is still in high school. She has had trouble applying for unemployment as a minor. My other daughter is in her first year of college, and she has had to come home because of Covid-19. She works as an interpreter, and she has been unable to apply for unemployment. The systems we're navigating are complicated, and there are different rules or circumstances depending on the situation. Sometimes it's hard to know where to go for help, and sometimes it's even hard to ask for help. It's frustrating. Also it is difficult as immigrants to hear all the comments that people make about us, that we don't deserve benefits or support. It is very important for this law to be passed so we can all have the support we need to provide for our families and ourselves during this crisis.

**Daniel Herrera**

My name is Daniel Herrera. I am 67 years old, and I live with my wife, two children and three grandchildren. My wife has type 2 diabetes. My daughter and I were the only ones supporting our family. I worked at Cowboy Jack's and they laid me off like my daughter. Between her and I, we pay all the bills, rent, and food.

We are both out of work due to this covid 19 epidemic.  My wife and I are very stressed by the deaths of older people. There are no face masks in stores and outside many people do not use them so there are more risks for us. We did not go to the doctor for medicine because of the risk, also we have no money for medicine or health insurance.

We do not qualify for disability or for the money that Trump offered, we need more opportunities, more support from the government. We are 7 in my house and without money to pay rent, food or bills, we need more support. Please pass this law, it is necessary for our community at this time!

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Merle Payne

Co-Director of CTUL