

Newsom announces Covid-19 relief for undocumented workers; advocates say it's inadequate.

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Before he was governor of California, he was lieutenant governor. He spoke at an event in Santa Cruz in 2015.

Nic Coury

Gov. Gavin Newsom announced plans on April 15 to make \$75 million available to help undocumented workers left out of unemployment relief programs like the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act known as CARES. It could mean \$500 each in the hands of 150,000 adults after applications start being accepted next month.

There's a problem with that plan, however, say advocates for those workers—many of whom have been deemed essential during the shelter-in-place order; there are 1.75 million undocumented workers in California. Those advocates estimate less than 10 percent would be helped by the governor's Disaster Relief Fund.

A coalition of leaders from the Central Coast and Southern California blasted Newsom's announcement as a "half-measure" in a press release on April 16. The groups comprised of clergy and community leaders include the Communities Organized for Relational Power in Action, or COPA, the Industrial Areas Foundation, One LA-IAF, as well as the Inland Communities Organizing Network.

In addition to the \$75 million in Disaster Relief Fund monies, Newsom announced \$50 million in pledges from private sources. The Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees (GCIR), a network of foundations focused on immigration issues, committed to raising the money through the California Immigrant Resilience Fund. Initial lead investments of \$5.5 million are coming from the Emerson Collective, Blue Shield of California Foundation, The California Endowment, The James Irvine Foundation, Chan Zuckerberg Initiative and an anonymous donor, among others.

"During this moment of national crisis, undocumented immigrants are risking their own health on behalf of the rest of us, saving lives as health care workers; caring for our loved ones and growing much of the food we depend on," said Laurene Powell Jobs, Founder and President of Emerson Collective in the governor's announcement.

Jobs said she that in the absence of help from the federal government, she hoped that corporations, foundations and individuals across would provide emergency relief to the workers.

The plan drew sharp criticism from the coalition that spoke out Thursday.

"Governor Newsom's plan to help undocumented immigrants is woefully inadequate," said Janet Hirsch, an IAF leader in Los Angeles. "What is owed in justice should never be given to charity. While we commend Governor Newsom for having good intentions, far more is needed to provide effective and equitable relief for undocumented workers and their families."

Advocates point out that many of those undocumented workers are deemed essential during shelter-in-place orders, including agricultural, food processing, delivery, maintenance and cleaning workers. They also said that the \$500 per adult, with a cap of \$1,000 per household, doesn't match the high cost of housing.

“It has always been hard to stay afloat living in California. This pandemic has taken away almost all of my income right now,” said Lupe Jara, an IAF leader in Seaside. “We’re left trying to figure out how to pay our rent, keep our electricity on, buy food and keep paying our kids’ tuition.”

The coalition of advocates called for several initiatives to help undocumented workers including: expanding the eligibility of State Disability Insurance to workers unemployed because of Covid-19 but ineligible for unemployment insurance; sending \$1,200 to any Californian who qualified for the California Earned Income Tax Credit last year or this year; expanding no-cost to low-cost hotel options to agricultural workers; making more money available to food banks and school districts feeding students.

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Pam Marino joined the Monterey County Weekly in November 2016. She covers the communities of Carmel, Pacific Grove, Del Rey Oaks, Pebble Beach and North County. She also covers tourism, health, housing and homelessness, business and agriculture.