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Faith leaders call on state to support undocumented immigrants

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CALIFORNIA—Bishop Jaime Soto of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Sacramento, along with 1,000 other faith and community leaders from the [California Industrial Areas Foundation \(IAF\)](#), on Tuesday will convene with state legislators on Zoom to call for more support for undocumented immigrants during the Covid-19 pandemic.

“A huge number of our essential workers... have been left out of federal and state relief. Without them, we literally could not feed ourselves or care for our families during this crisis,” said Maria Elena Manzo, leader with Sacred Heart Catholic Church and [Communities Organized for Relational Power in Action](#) (COPA).

COPA is the local organization affiliated with the IAF, aiming to train leaders in community-based institutions throughout Monterey, Santa Cruz and San Benito Counties. COPA works with faith communities, unions, schools and other institutions. All organizations are nonpartisan, multi-issue and multilingual.

In California, one out of 10 workers are undocumented immigrants, and their labor is largely in work deemed essential during the Covid-19 pandemic: agriculture, food production, food distribution, food service, child care and elder care, among other industries. The Monterey/San Benito County region has the highest proportion of undocumented workers in the state.

The federal government has excluded undocumented immigrants from relief, and Governor Newsom’s initiatives to date will provide small cash payments to only 150,000 of the 2.2 million essential immigrant workers—less than 7 percent.

“It is morally wrong, and it is careless from a public health and economic perspective to leave essential workers without cash payments and without adequate protection during a pandemic,” said

Janet Hirsch, a leader with Temple Isaiah and IAF's One LA. "The people who feed us shouldn't have to rely on charity to feed and protect themselves."

Part of the policy asks for the meeting will be to expand the California Earned Income Tax Credit (Cal EITC) to all workers who pay taxes, including a large number of undocumented immigrants. The CDC cites an analysis of the economic impact of a federal EITC in California, which found that payments contributed to more than \$5 billion in business sales in the state and helped add nearly 30,000 jobs.

The May 5 California IAF meeting will include over 200 leaders from COPA, as well as representatives from seven other IAF organizations from across the state. Several state legislators including Senator Maria Elena Durazo (Los Angeles), Assemblymember David Chiu (San Francisco), and Assemblymember Eloise Gomez-Reyes (San Bernardino) will respond to the IAF leaders' agenda. Locally, Senator Anna Caballero and other officials will attend.

"We don't want charity for these workers, we want justice," said Rev. Robin Mathews-Johnson, a leader with Watsonville First United Methodist Church and COPA. "Our neighbors and friends are putting their lives on the line for us right now. They pay \$3.2 billion in state and local taxes. Investing back into these families right now is not just the right thing to do, it is good for our economy. It is good for all Californians.