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NEW REPORT FINDS OHIO'S ESSENTIAL WORKERS PRECARIOUSLY POSITIONED DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Many Suffered from Lack of Protections; Group Calls for Direct Relief

Fremont, OH – As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact Ohioans, a new study from the Essential Ohio Coalition tells a story of the disproportionate impacts on essential workers since March 2020.

The Essential Ohio coalition in collaboration with Cleveland State University published the *Heroes Work Here* study today which reveals the **intersecting systems that position essential workers in greater precarity due to patterns of exclusion related to gender, race and ethnicity, immigration status, and language, among other forms of discrimination, neglect, and harm**. The purpose of the study was to document conditions for essential workers in the State of Ohio during the pandemic.

“This study importantly shows that the stories told by the essential workers in this project demand attention from employers, the state of Ohio, and the federal government,” said Mónica Ramírez, founder and president of Justice for Migrant Women. “If workers are to be considered essential to the functioning of society, they should not only be compensated as such but treated in a way that reflects their value and expertise.”

Ohio received \$5.36 billion in flexible state fiscal recovery funds for Ohio to recover, repay, restore and rebuild from the pandemic. State leaders have encumbered more than three-fourths of Ohio's first payment of \$2.7 billion.

The results of the survey and the narratives of the essential workers underscore the **need for better policy solutions to address issues of paid leave, premium compensation, workplace safety, and affordable and reliable childcare.**

"There is no doubt essential workers were main contributors to our survival during the pandemic, keeping us alive with essential services from food production to medical assistance. Yet millions of these workers are not even recognized by our government as legal residents," said Beatriz Maya, La Conexión Executive Director and member of the Essential Ohio coalition. "Others did not receive paid sick days or wage increases and had to endure working without the most basic protections for months after the pandemic had started. With the *Heroes Work Here* study, we want to bring you closer to their lives during the pandemic, and hopefully **spark discussion about the urgent need for long-lasting protection for workers we call 'heroes.'**"

The study offers new insight into first-hand experiences of essential workers and the gaps in the protection they felt during the pandemic. For instance, close to **40 percent of essential employees across industries reported receiving no protections** across several basic safeguards for their health. Nine percent of the survey respondents said their employers refused to follow or required the worker to ignore safety guidelines during the pandemic. As a result, essential workers did not consistently receive access to workplace safety measures that were recommended by the CDC and the State of Ohio.

"I have been an essential worker for close to 20 years," said Sandra Ellington, SEIU Local 1, a janitor at Cleveland Hopkins International Airport. "A lot of people didn't realize how important our job was until the pandemic happened, but we knew our job was always important."

Essential Ohio is part of a national campaign, *Always Essential*, founded in 2020 to elevate and fight alongside the working people that have always been known to be essential.

"This report, participatory in its research methods and design, aims to make visible the experience of essential workers, to bring readers closer to the human realities and structural dimensions of essential work, particularly in the context of an ongoing and unpredictable pandemic, added Anne Galleta, Ph.D., professor and chair at Cleveland State University. "As noted in an essential worker's oral history, '*It shouldn't take a pandemic for people to make a livable wage.*'"

“We are calling on Gov. Mike DeWine to allocate these American Rescue Plan funds to provide direct support to essential workers,” said Laura Nadal, Community Organizer for Justice for Migrant Women. **“With the conversation about the return to ‘normal,’ we must remember that ‘normal’ for these essential workers meant being forgotten, mistreated, and without protection. Financial relief for these workers would show them that their humanity during the pandemic mattered.”**

The full report can be found [here](#).

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