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**With Black and Latino Ohioans at Outsized Risk for COVID-19,
Essential Ohio Demands Protections for All Essential Workers**

Columbus, OH – COVID-19 has diminished the average U.S. lifespan by an entire year, but Black Americans and those of Latin American origin have lost 2.7 and 1.9 years, respectively, according to the [CDC](#). Overrepresented in essential occupations, these workers are still not being prioritized for vaccines.

On February 8, Essential Ohio sent a [letter](#) to Governor DeWine and Ohio Health Department Director McCloud, urging them to prioritize essential workers for COVID-19 vaccines; we are still awaiting their answer. The letter outlines other worker protections, like paid sick leave, that are “essential” to the lives and wellbeing of these workers and must be extended to them immediately. Consider these facts:

- Black Ohioans make up 13% of the population, but are more likely to work in essential occupations ([Tiana N. Rogers et al](#)). As a direct result, they make up 23% of COVID-19 cases, 31% of hospitalizations, and 19% of deaths in Ohio ([Health Policy Institute of Ohio](#)).
- Ohio Latinos also have [higher rates](#) of COVID-19 infections and hospitalizations. Many work in jobs in food production, manufacturing, and agriculture. Those who are immigrants, especially undocumented immigrants, are forced to accept all of the risks of these positions--which can already be dangerous, even absent a pandemic--and receive none of the COVID-19 economic aid from our government.
- According to the [Center for American Progress](#), nearly 47,000 Ohioans working in essential jobs are immigrants without stable legal status. Still, they pay more than \$757 million in federal, state, and local taxes; \$161 million in mortgage loans; and \$291 million in rent. Their total purchasing power is nearly \$2 billion. And, they have 27,000 minor children who are U.S. citizens.
- Most undocumented essential workers have been in the United States for more than a decade and live in the same home as U.S. citizens. In fact, 40% own their homes ([FWD.US](#)). In [Columbus](#), undocumented immigrants comprise 12% of all essential workers. Immigrants, both documented and undocumented, make up 20% of the essential workforce nationwide.

Essential workers continue to show up and do their jobs, despite the risk of contracting this deadly virus and the lack of a financial or health safety net. In fact, nearly one in five U.S. workers are [exposed to the virus at least once per month](#), with many exposed every week. Most restaurant workers stand [within six feet of a customer without a mask](#) every shift.

“For a year, politicians praised essential workers as ‘heroes’ but let them contract the virus and die at alarming rates. In order to keep doing the work we all see as essential for society to function, it is essential that these workers receive both priority access to the vaccine and broad-based worker protections. Yesterday is already too late,” said **Sarah Ingles, Board President, Central Ohio Worker Center.**

The Ohio group is part of a national campaign, Always Essential, which is also urging the [Biden Administration](#) and [National Governors Association](#) to prioritize essential workers in vaccine distribution.

#EssentialOH is powered by ABLE, Justice for Migrant Women, the Ohio Immigrant Alliance, Cleveland Jobs with Justice, La Conexión, Policy Matters, Cincinnati Interfaith Workers Center, and Central Ohio Worker Center. [Essential Ohio](#) is part of a national campaign, Always Essential.

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