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**OHIO WORKER CENTERS CALL FOR GREATER EQUITY IN THE UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION SYSTEM**

**OHIO, October 11, 2021** - The Cincinnati Interfaith Worker Center, The Central Ohio Worker Center, and The Northeast Ohio Worker Center are writing in support of the state of Ohio’s application for the *Grant Opportunity for Promoting Equitable Access to Unemployment Compensation (UC) Programs*.

We have long known that the state unemployment compensation system has been difficult for workers to navigate. Even in the best of times, the process to apply, receive, and retain benefits for many unemployed Ohioans can be complex, intimidating, and at times dehumanizing. With the onset of the pandemic, the inequities embedded and institutionalized within our unemployment system became even more apparent.

Thousands of Ohioans have found themselves on the wrong side of the unemployment compensation system over the last 18 months. Disproportionately, these folks hardest hit by the pandemic and most in need of relief are people of color and women and as such, we are heartened to see the opportunity through the federal government to access dollars that will begin to build a more equitable unemployment system.

Areas where our worker centers see some of the most opportunity include:

* An assessment and update of official unemployment compensation resources and notices to improve readability and replace jargon and legal phrases with common terms.
* Greater outreach to foreign language speaking communities, improved translation of documents and notices, and increased access to translation services to guide foreign language speakers through the unemployment compensation process.
* Conducting implicit bias training with unemployment compensation staff who in many cases are able to use their subjective judgement to determine aspects of an individual’s eligibility for unemployment benefits.
* Expanding and improving the collection of unemployment data that is disaggregated by race - this includes data for those not only applying for unemployment compensation benefits, but also those who receive and retain unemployment compensation.
* Review and update of eligibility requirements for individuals seeking to access unemployment compensation benefits to include the permanent expansion of benefits to self-employed, free lancers, and contract workers. Expansion of unemployment compensation benefits must also specifically include the inclusion of undocumented immigrant workers.

To deliver on the areas outlined above, we hope that The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services will consider creating a worker oversight committee for the unemployment system and partner with local worker-led and community based groups who are actively working to build more equitable systems in their communities. Where there are people, there is power and we hope that the state recognizes the power of its people to inform, co-create, and design a more equitable unemployment compensation system.