

**Written Testimony: Impact of COVID-19 on the Workforce**  
**New York Committee for Occupational Safety and Health (NYCOSH)**  
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Today, in New York State, workers are in crisis. Workers are facing record numbers of unemployment, and workers are facing unprecedented health and safety risks on the job. Essential workers have been exposed to COVID-19 hazards since the virus emerged in New York State, and many have gotten sick—the exact number, we do not know. Some workers have not quite “chosen” to go back to work in unsafe conditions, but have been forced to due to economic necessity, and in doing so, are exposing themselves and their families to health hazards.

Why are workers at such risk when we have an agency, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, which is intended to protect workers from safety and health on the job? Simply put, the agency is asleep at the wheel. They have issued guidance, and no enforceable standards whatsoever. To make matters worse, they aren’t enforcing already existing standards.

**First, NYCOSH is joining its colleagues in labor and the community to call on New York State to pass legislation, New York HERO, that would create enforceable standards to protect workers from COVID-19.** This would include protocols on: testing, face masks, PPE, social distancing, hand hygiene, disinfection, and engineering controls.

For those of you who may not think this legislation is necessary, I ask you—who do workers call when they experience health and safety violations on the job? They can’t call Federal OSHA, because no one will come. These are the kinds of questions that we get every day from workers that we train; they are being exploited at work and they don’t know what to do about it.

When we train these workers and they ask us these questions, we honestly and truthfully don’t know where to send them, because the guidance that has been put forward is largely not enforceable. Strong penalties and enforcement mechanisms will lead to increased compliance and lower COVID transmission rates. So again, we encourage the legislature to protect workers with enforceable standards to protect them from COVID-19.

Finally, earlier I mentioned that when workers do not have economic stability, they will ultimately work in jobs that will exploit them and put them in unsafe conditions. **We believe one solution to protect undocumented workers, who have been excluded from federal aid, is to support the Excluded Worker Bailout Act.**

Thank you to the Senate and Assembly for having me here; I appreciate the opportunity.