



**Oral Testimony of
Janet Fry**

Deputy Executive Director

Community Resource Center of Larchmont and Mamaroneck

Executive Director
Jirandy Martinez, MPA

Deputy Executive Director
Janet M. Fry

Board of Directors

Chair
Carol Pouchie

Treasurer
Luisa Fuentes

Secretary
Nina Recio Cuddy

Leonard Aubrey
Juan Diaz
John Farris
John S. Gitlitz
David Kies
Petra Pasquina
Ian Rhodes
Saad Siddiqui
Amy Vijayanagar
Seth Weitzman
Leilani Yizar

Ex-Officio
Liz Liscio
Martha Lopez-Hanratty

**Submitted to the Senate Standing Committee on Cities 2
At the hearing of on Poverty and Concentrated Poverty in Small and
Medium Sized Cities**

December 12, 2023

Good morning, Senator May and esteemed committee members. My name is Janet Fry and I'm the Deputy Executive Director of the Community Resource Center of Larchmont and Mamaroneck. We're a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting our community, particularly the most vulnerable, including immigrants and low-income residents.

We've historically been a service organization, providing ESL classes and workforce development as well as case management, and legal services. Recently we expanded to include community organizing and advocacy, because the need for support is greater than we can meet. We empower our community and advocate on their behalf to improve County and State policies.

Having worked for the CRC for 19 years, including as a case manager and DOJ legal representative, I'd like to share with you what I have personally witnessed, both in terms of the causes and effects of poverty. I'd also like to suggest a number of policies that would alleviate poverty in our State.

Of the more than 6000 clients the CRC serves annually, most are essential workers such as house cleaners, nannies, and day laborers. Many of our clients are undocumented and mixed status families. The vast majority of our clients live at or below the poverty level. One of the primary causes of poverty is that many of our community members live in the shadows. They are gainfully employed, contributing to our community, but without legal status. This makes them vulnerable in many ways, including employment insecurity, substandard housing, and the constant risk of deportation.

During the pandemic, New York passed the Excluded Workers fund, which provided critical support and literally saved countless lives. Unfortunately, the Excluded Workers fund has been exhausted and the workers, the fathers, mothers, and children, who benefitted from that program have once again been forgotten and relegated to the shadows.

Education

Opportunity

Growth

Our current UI program has not been updated for decades and does not reflect today's economy. In addition to undocumented workers, many citizens who work as independent contractors or freelancers are excluded.

The Unemployment Bridge Program would provide compensation to workers who are currently excluded from Unemployment Insurance.

Depriving workers of unemployment benefits prevents employees from speaking up when they experience unsafe working conditions. Providing access to unemployment benefits allows us to hold bad employers accountable, making workplaces safer for everyone.

Another challenge that many of our community members face is substandard housing. This is not only an effect of poverty, but also perpetuates it. There are areas of Mamaroneck which have experienced repeated and severe floods in recent years. You'd think that after the first flood, people would move elsewhere. However, due to the unaffordability of housing, these residents have no other options. And when these floods happen, the residents often experience trauma, suffer time away from work, and lose everything. They are forced, by financial necessity, into living in unsafe housing conditions, which perpetuates their poverty.

Thankfully, New York has well-developed laws to protect tenants from exploitation by landlords. Unfortunately, many tenants are unable to avail themselves of those protections because they cannot afford legal representation. Tenants are fearful of raising concerns about the habitability of dwellings because they fear retaliatory eviction. Statewide Right to Counsel would ensure that every tenant in New York has access to a lawyer when faced with potential eviction.

As I mentioned earlier, many of the community members we serve are undocumented immigrants and mixed status families, which entails its own unique challenges. When they are forced into deportation proceedings, they need legal representation. Despite contributing significantly to our communities, most undocumented immigrants are low income and cannot afford legal counsel. They frequently rely on non-profit organizations like the CRC to support them with legal services. However, the CRC and many similar organizations are at capacity and do not have enough funding to meet the tremendous need for legal services in our communities.



Legal representation often makes the difference between succeeding in immigration proceedings or being separated from family and deported. When a parent is deported, the family left behind struggles that much more to make ends meet and is often faced with extreme poverty. This, in turn, places an increased burden on government services and non-profit organizations to help meet just the most basic needs of the community members left behind. Access to Legal Representation would ensure that our community members have a chance at a fair immigration proceeding.

Undocumented immigrants not only contribute to our economy, they pay taxes, they pay over a billion dollars in State and Local taxes annually. Passing legislation such as the Unemployment Bridge Program, Statewide Right To Counsel, and Access to Representation, would be three steps in the right direction, towards alleviating poverty in New York.

Thank you for your time.

Respectfully,

Janet Fry
Deputy Executive Director