New Mexico essential workers and families continue to struggle financially due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. A new statewide poll in December found one-third of Latinos, including immigrants, are still struggling to survive economically. They experienced lost income and increased debt and many were excluded from government stimulus rebates and unemployment benefits. These obstacles, made worse by the recent Omicron wave and closures at schools and businesses, are making it extremely difficult for low-income families to recover from the COVID-19 crisis.

In 2022, state legislators will decide how to spend a $1.6 billion surplus in the state's general fund, a surplus made possible by the hard work of essential immigrant workers in the oil and gas industry. They'll also allocate $700 million in federal funding from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to help speed up the state's health and economic recovery.

The Legislature must allocate funding for emergency economic relief for low-wage workers, rural residents, and immigrant families who were excluded from traditional relief and who have fallen far behind the rest of New Mexico. We also need to make it easier for essential low-wage workers to vote and have a say in future budget issues.
Allocating $15.6 million of ARPA funds to the Human Services Department (HSD) to provide $600 to 26,000 low-income adults who did not receive the three federal stimulus rebates and New Mexico’s 2021 state stimulus. Due to their mixed immigration or tax status, over 30,000 immigrant or very low-income families were unable to access the three federal stimulus rebates, the state’s tax rebate, unemployment benefits, or paid sick leave when exposed to COVID-19. That means a family with three (3) children easily missed out on $40,000-$50,000 in cash relief during the last two years.

Provide a one-time $600 rebate to the lowest income tax filers who qualify for the state’s Working Families Tax Credit & the Low- & Middle-income taxpayers exemption. Research shows the most effective ways to provide relief to families most impacted by the pandemic, reduce poverty and recirculate money in local economies is through more equitable tax policy. The New Mexico Legislature enacted a similar rebate during the 2021 legislative session and about 160,000 households qualified.

Reform anti-donation clause in NM Constitution to allow our government to provide crucial support to families in need. The outdated anti-donation clause makes it difficult for local governments to use state funding for the public good. Voters should be able help eliminate roadblocks to essential infrastructure projects, disaster relief and community well-being.

Expand voting rights so low-wage workers have a stronger voice in NM. NM should ensure low-wage workers and people of color in rural communities can vote by making it easier to register online, implementing a back-end automatic voter registration (AVR) system, improving our mail-in voting system, and allowing early voting until the Sunday before Election Day.

MORE DATA: (POLL SAMPLE: 1000 LATINOS ACROSS THE STATE).

- 30% have had difficulty paying their bills or utilities.
- 26% had to spend all of their savings or went into debt.
- 19% took out high-interest loans from payday loan shops.
- 28% borrowed money from friends and family to get by.
- 58% of Latinos believe it is very important that all families have access to government resources regardless of immigration status.
- 68% of NM that received economic relief or cash assistance from federal or state government used it for basic living expenses such as food, clothes, gas-etc.
- 24% are not confident they can pay for current basic living expenses. Like food, housing, utilities and medical care.

Across the board, Hispanics in rural communities are faring worse economically than are those in urban areas, and so are Latina women.