



Media Contact:

Marcela Díaz, Somos Un Pueblo Unido
marcela@somosunpueblounido.org
(505) 424-7832

Sharon Kayne, Communications
Director, NM Voices for Children
skayne@nmvoices.org
505-361-1288

Guaranteed Income Pilot Report: Cash Assistance Programs Improve Work, School Outcomes

SANTA FE, NM—A report on a recently concluded statewide guaranteed income pilot program with 330 immigrant families demonstrated unrestricted cash assistance programs allowed for low-wage earners to pursue better jobs, increase their educational levels, and improve other critical outcomes for their children.

The report, *Guaranteed Income: Increasing Employment and Helping Families Thrive*, on the New Mexico Guaranteed Income Pilot Program for Immigrant Families, was released on December 12, 2023. The 18-month guaranteed income (GI) pilot program was created in 2022 to address poverty and economic security for low-income, mixed-immigration status families and workers in New Mexico. Immigrant families were chosen for the pilot because polling showed these families struggled significantly more than the general population during the pandemic because of numerous exclusions from the country's safety net; these exclusions were due to lack of a social security number even if the household had U.S.-citizen children. In addition, many immigrant parents are not eligible for public safety-net programs, even though many are essential workers, make substantial tax contributions, and have positive economic impacts on our communities, state, and nation.

The program selected 330 mixed-immigration status households to receive unconditional direct cash transfers of \$500 monthly for 12 months from February 2022 to February 2023. One-third of households sampled came from rural communities and two-thirds from urban communities. An additional extension was granted to 50 randomly selected mixed-status households to receive \$500 monthly for an additional 6 months (February 2023-August 2023). Participants resided in Bernalillo, Santa Fe, Doña Ana, Rio Arriba, San Juan, Lea, Chaves, and McKinley counties.

“As New Mexico lawmakers are looking at additional ways to help working families who are struggling, they should take guaranteed income programs into consideration,” said Javier Rojo, a Senior Research and Policy Analyst with NM Voices for Children and the report author. “More than 35 cities across the nation are exploring GI programs. They are gaining traction because they are effective at reducing poverty and improving outcomes for families and children, especially for families excluded from the country's safety net.”

The pilot program was designed and implemented by the five New Mexico organizations that constitute the NM Economic Relief Working Group (EL CENTRO de Igualdad y Derechos, NM CAFé, NM Voices for Children, Partnership for Community Action, and Somos un Pueblo Unido) and UpTogether, an Oakland-based nonprofit focused on investing in families and individuals with limited income by providing them with cash.

“Low-wage workers who are helping sustain our local economy used these cash payments to cover rising housing and living expenses. Like other GI projects across the country, New Mexico’s pilot shows participants were also able to improve their employment opportunities,” said Marcela Díaz, executive director of Somos Un Pueblo Unido. “GI and recurring cash assistance are tools policymakers should be utilizing more often to empower workers as they pursue training and better job opportunities.”

“As one of many immigrants who does not have access to a job or medical insurance, the guaranteed income program was very helpful for my medication and additional payments,” said Eliza, a GI participant from Doña Ana County. “If guaranteed basic income were approved permanently in the state of New Mexico, it would be very beneficial for many immigrant families like mine.”

“Our economic relief programs and our GI pilot study set the foundation for future policymaking aimed at more inclusive, just and equitable economic reform,” stated Rachel LaZar, executive director of El CENTRO de Igualdad y Derechos. “As our study and studies around the nation show, cash transfers are one of the most direct and effective ways to provide financial stability to our communities and to allow essential workers, the cornerstone of our economy, the ability to improve their job opportunities, especially relevant at a time when we have worker shortage in key industries that need to be filled.”

“UpTogether applauds New Mexico for being one of the few states investing in statewide guaranteed income initiatives. We are proud to have partnered on this important work,” said UpTogether’s senior director of partnerships, Ivanna Neri. “Let’s continue to work together on improving how we address poverty. Investing directly in families, giving them full choice and control over their lives, is a proven way to help them get ahead and achieve their goals.

“Guaranteed income goes beyond addressing immediate financial need; it shapes a powerful narrative in favor of cash transfer as a strategy for economic security and mobility,” said Nichelle Gilbert, executive director of Partnership for Community Action. “The link to employment uplifts the potential to address worker shortages by increasing access to training and job readiness opportunities, particularly in critical industries such as early childhood education. This recognizes and honors New Mexico’s essential early childhood educators and the crucial role they play in shaping both the future generation and the economic development of our state.”

“The program was a lifeline and I liked the fact the program showed that as working class families, we can be trusted and are capable of making decisions about how we spend our money in the best interest of our families. I also see it as an investment in New Mexico families who contribute as workers, taxpayers and consumers,” said Maria de Carmen de Jesus Guerrero, a GBI participant from Albuquerque. “My husband and I have also both experienced discrimination and labor abuse at previous jobs. Having guaranteed basic income would give workers options to seek out better employment, instead of

suffering in silence, and would even make it possible to participate in workforce development programs..”

The full report, *Guaranteed Income: Increasing Employment and Helping Families Thrive*, and its fact sheet are available online at <https://www.nmvoices.org/archives/18507>

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NM Voices for Children is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization advocating for policies to improve the health and well-being of New Mexico's children, families and communities. El CENTRO de Igualdad y Derechos is a grassroots, Latino immigrant-led immigrants' rights, civil rights, and workers justice organization based in Albuquerque. NM CAFé is a network of diverse religious institutions and community broad-based organizations across southern New Mexico committed to building relational power with and for New Mexicans who have been directly impacted by systems of injustice. Partnership for Community Action works to build strong, healthy communities in Albuquerque's South Valley and across New Mexico. Somos un Pueblo Unido is a statewide membership-based and immigrant-led organization that works to promote racial and worker justice. UpTogether is a systems change organization working to disrupt the status quo approach to ending poverty because it's not working.

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Somos Un Pueblo Unido | 1804 Espinacitas St. SantaFe, NM 87505 | (505) 424-7832 | somos@somosunpueblounido.org | somosunpueblounido.org
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