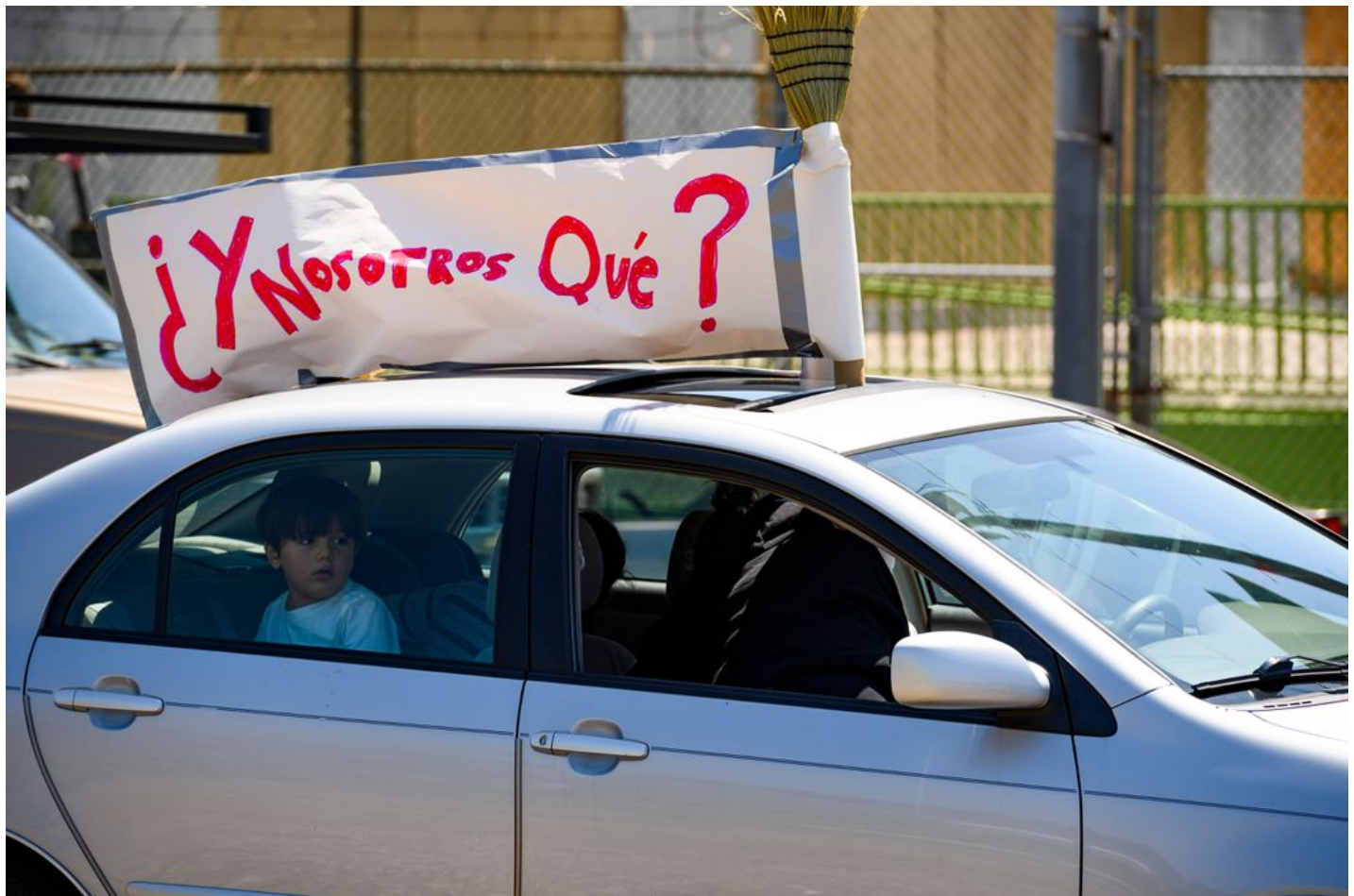


## EDITORIAL

# The taxpaying workers in Massachusetts who still need coronavirus cash relief

Undocumented workers who pay taxes have been neglected by federal and state pandemic relief efforts. They deserve some support.

By **The Editorial Board** Updated May 30, 2020, 4:00 a.m.



California day laborers and their supporters participated in a caravan last month in Los Angeles to call on Governor Gavin Newsom to ensure that COVID-19-related emergency financial aid from the federal CARES Act reaches day laborers, undocumented workers, and their families. ROBYN BECK/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Renato Trombini feels very lucky. While the 42-year-old immigrant lost his work and wages during the pandemic, as many other people did, Trombini had some savings to get

him through these hard times. He is single and has no dependents. Nonetheless, Trombini, who lives in Everett and has worked in construction ever since he moved here from Brazil 15 years ago, is worried about making ends meet over the next few months.

Because of his immigration status and lack of a social security number, Trombini is not eligible for state or federal government assistance like unemployment insurance or the stimulus checks included in the CARES Act, the coronavirus relief package that Congress enacted a few weeks ago.

Yet Trombini is one of those immigrants who has been paying federal income taxes — in his case, annually since 2006.

“Why, if I pay my taxes, can’t I get some help from the government until things get back to normal?” asked Trombini. “People like me, we pay taxes because we see the benefits everywhere . . . a new high school, new parks. And those tax payments come from our hard labor. We look around and see other people getting help from the government now. Why not us?”

A bill in the State House wants to right that wrong, and legislators should pass it. It would give [people like Trombini](#) — Massachusetts residents who pay state and federal income taxes using an [Individual Tax Identification Number](#), or ITIN — a state-funded cash rebate similar to the federal \$1,200 stimulus checks. Immigrants like him are part of the fabric of the state workforce and communities, and leaving them behind will only exacerbate poverty, create unnecessary hardship, and dilute the power of the economic stimulus that the checks from the federal government were intended to create.

Indeed, even for immigrants who do not have legal status, their payment of taxes on a routine basis to support government services should make them eligible for relief specifically given to taxpayers.



Director Patricia Montes (right) and John Walkey of Centro Presente delivered food packages in East Boston last month. Centro Presente delivered the food packages from the City of Boston to some of the vulnerable immigrant families the organization works with. CRAIG F. WALKER/GLOBE STAFF/THE BOSTON GLOBE

“The biggest concern among immigrant families right now is food,” said Natalicia Tracy, executive director of the [Brazilian Worker Center](#), an organization based in Allston that has been giving out aid to families during the pandemic, including people who don’t have legal immigration status. “I can’t believe how much food insecurity exists at the moment. After food, the need is paying basic bills and rent. Your cell phone bill is a major one, because you want to stay communicated as you look for a job.”

It is estimated that there are roughly [57,000 adults and children in ITIN](#) taxpayer households in Massachusetts, and enacting legislation to issue state-funded cash rebates for them would amount to \$58 million. That’s not a huge amount of money, but in these times of economic hardship, the state budget is also taking a huge hit.

“We are all hurting but we know this pandemic is not hitting people equally,” said state Representative Christine Barber, who along with state Representative Tricia Farley-

Bouvier filed [the bill](#) in the State House. The purpose of stimulus checks isn't just to help families; it's also a pragmatic measure to help the broader economy by ensuring that people still have money to spend at stores and for services — undocumented residents can boost the economy through their spending as well as anyone else.

So, how to pay for it? The Massachusetts Law Reform Institute proposes one way. Under the federal [CARES Act](#), state, local, and tribal governments received a total of \$150 billion to mitigate the effects of the coronavirus. The state of Massachusetts is getting [nearly \\$1.5 billion](#). Immigrant rights advocates say that pool of money might be available to tap into for emergency financial assistance to immigrants and their families.

California has been the only state so far to offer assistance to undocumented immigrants who have been excluded from federal coronavirus relief programs. The \$125 million [program](#) (with \$75 million coming from public funds and the rest from private donations and charitable giving) supports a one-time grant of \$500 per person or \$1,000 per household. It is estimated that it will reach only 150,000 California immigrants. On the first day that applications were available, the [website crashed](#) and people clogged the phone lines.

The [HEROES Act](#), recently passed by the House, would enact a second round of stimulus checks for American taxpayers and would remedy the exclusion of ITIN filers. But unless it is enacted, which is considered unlikely, the state must step in.

Not helping the most vulnerable residents of Massachusetts by giving them cash transfers to weather the financial challenges of the pandemic will be akin to a self-inflicted injury and make the crisis worse. And the money will go a long way.

“Even \$100 is making a huge difference in people’s lives right now,” said Tracy, who added that she’s seen many cases of vulnerable immigrants ineligible for federal aid being harassed by hostile landlords who are collecting anything they can from tenants. “Can you imagine what a difference \$1,200 will make?”

Editorials represent the views of the Boston Globe Editorial Board. Follow us on Twitter at [@GlobeOpinion](#).

[Show 42 comments](#)

---

©2020 Boston Globe Media Partners, LLC