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Essential Stories: Black Worker COVID-19 Economic Health Impact Survey

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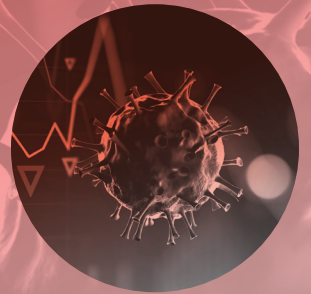
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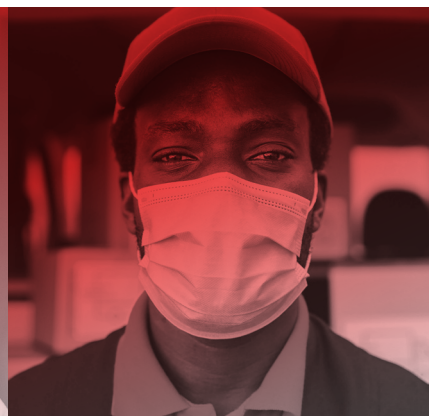
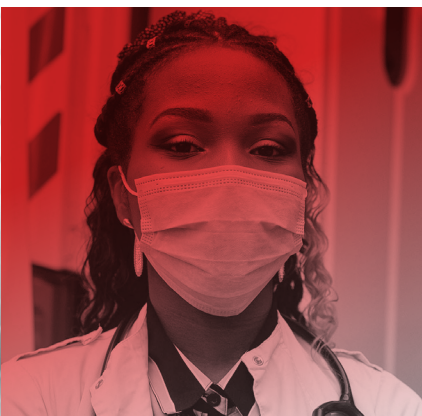
FEBRUARY 2022

Essential Stories:

Black Worker COVID-19
Economic Health
Impact Survey



A REPORT BY THE UCLA CENTER FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF RACIAL EQUITY AT WORK



UCLA Center for the Advancement
of Racial Equity at Work

Housed at the UCLA Downtown Labor Center • 675 S Park View St, Los Angeles, CA 90057

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About Us

CARE at Work - The Center for the Advancement of Racial Equity at Work ([CARE at Work](#)), housed in the UCLA Labor Center engages Black workers and economic justice advocates and facilitates innovative solutions that address the needs of Black working-class people. Through a school-to-movement pathway of service, teaching, capacity-building, and research, our purpose is to reveal conditions of Black work in Southern California under global racial capitalism and model approaches for change.

Southern California Black Worker Hub for Regional Organizing ([SoCal BW Hub](#)) - As a Black-led and empowering collaboration, the Southern California Black Worker Organizing Resource Hub (a project of the Los Angeles Black Worker Center) expands the field of Black worker organizing. We provide the necessary backbone support, training, and coordination needed to develop Black Worker Centers across the region and build a unified Black worker voice and power in Southern California and beyond.

Labor Center - The UCLA Labor Center believes that a public university belongs to the people and should advance quality education and employment for all. Every day we bring together workers, students, faculty, and policymakers to address the most critical issues facing working people today. Our research, education, and policy work lifts industry standards, creates jobs that are good for communities, and strengthens immigrant rights, especially for students and youth.

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Acknowledgments

In Memory

We want to dedicate this space to honor so many Black workers who lost their lives in this pandemic. Our dear friend Sadé Williams was one of them. Today, we honor her voice and life as well as her advocacy for Black worker protections while bringing a smile to everyone around her. We want to hold this space to remember her life and remind us how precious life is.

As a storyteller and part of the Essential Stories advisory committee, Sadé spent her precious time helping SoCal BW Hub shape the Essential Stories campaign and fighting for justice and equal employment opportunities for Black workers. Sadé's voice and story will forever leave an impact in all of our hearts as we continue to fight for justice in honoring all Black workers Sadé.

There is a need for sharing stories and having Black workers' voices be heard. This pandemic has been unforgiving, with little to no protections for essential workers in our communities. Thousands of Black workers' lives have been lost to this pandemic while millions are struggling to stay afloat. This report is shedding a light on Black working conditions, as well as, uniting and uplifting Black workers in Southern California and beyond.



Together, we will ensure Black workers are included in our country's plans for recovery, infrastructure, and Build Back Better so that Black workers are not left behind. Together, we will create real access and pathways for Black workers to build back better in communities that need help the most. That was Sadé's message to us.

Rest in Power

SADÉ WILLIAMS

DECEMBER 12TH, 1986 - NOVEMBER 3RD, 2021

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CARE at Work students - Motunrayo Ekunboyejo, Alayssia Townsell, Reggie Myles, Marcanthony Brown

Anchor partners - CARE at Work worked with Southern California Black Worker Hub (SoCal BW Hub) for Regional Organizing to recruit Black workers for the survey. We want to acknowledge SoCal BW

Hub member organizations, Earthlodge Center for Transformation, and the Congregations Organized for Prophetic Engagement for outreaching to workers and helping to coordinate this project. Special thanks to Felicia Jones, Pastor Samuel Casey, Pastor Benjamin Briggs, Laniea King, Yardenna Aaron, Iyatunde Folayan, Queen Hollins, Luz Elena, Elda Solomon, Taylor Jackson, and Jacie Rowe.

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Other partners - We also want to acknowledge the other partners who supported survey dissemination. SoCal BW Hub also worked with a number of other organizations to help with survey dissemination to Black workers.

<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Rebecca Johnson Consulting▪ Unemployed Workers United▪ BLU Educational Foundation▪ Starting Over, Inc▪ Black Women for Wellness▪ Black Voices Media▪ Youth Action Project▪ National Black Grad▪ Inland Empire Rebound▪ SBX Youth & Family Services▪ Tabernacle of Praise Worship Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ April Parker Foundation▪ Clarissa Manuel Foundation▪ Swazi Shop▪ San Diego Black Worker Center▪ SEIU 2015▪ SEIU 721▪ UDW Riverside▪ UDW San Diego▪ Premis Communications▪ L. Norwood & Associates
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We also want to acknowledge and thank the California Labor and Workforce Development Agency (LWDA). Much of the worker outreach done by partners that ran in tandem to the survey recruitment was funded through the COVID-19 Workplace Outreach Project. We appreciate LWDA for quickly building regional partnerships that centered Black workers while outreaching and educating workers on how to slow the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace.



About This Study: Methodology

The Center for the Advancement of Racial Equity at Work within the UCLA Labor Center and anchor partners Southern California Black Worker Hub for Regional Organizing [a project of the Los Angeles Black Worker Center] (SoCal BW Hub), Congregations Organized for Prophetic Engagement (COPE), and the Earthlodge Center for Transformation (Earthlodge) launched the Essential Stories research project to better understand the experiences and challenges of Black workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. This research project ran in tandem with the Essential Stories campaign, a movement-building advocacy campaign created to uplift the voices and experiences of Black workers in California led by the anchor partners. They aimed to ensure Black workers receive equitable and long-term COVID-19 recovery support, resources, and protections.

The study used a research justice modelⁱⁱⁱ and centered the experience and expertise of the worker center and community-based organizations involved in the project. The anchor partners were involved in the design, fielding, analysis, and dissemination plan. In part through their work on the COVID-19 Workplace Outreach Project, the anchor partners worked with several other community-based organizations and unions to engage over 40,000 Black workers in the Black Worker Rights + Wellness listening sessions, text banking, and phone banking in Southern California from March 2021 to August 2021. Together, these organizations recruited nearly 2,000 engaged Black workers across the Los Angeles, Inland Empire (San Bernardino and Riverside), and San Diego regions to complete the survey from May 2021 to

July 2021. The anchor organizations in partnership with Unemployed Workers United provided \$15 gift cards to the first 1000 workers to complete the survey. The online self-administered survey topics included working conditions during COVID-19, COVID-19 resources, impacts on personal life, and demographic information. While anyone who identified as a Black worker was able to take the survey, the outreach by the SoCal BW Hub and their partners targeted low-wage workers, essential workers, and workers likely economically impacted by COVID-19.

A team of CARE at Work researchers reviewed each survey, checked for errors, ran basic descriptive statistics like frequencies and crosstabs, and completed manual coding of the open-ended questions. Data fact sheets were presented to anchor partners through data analysis workshops. The team of researchers also conducted an extensive literature review and analyzed census data. The larger CARE at Work team and advisory members reviewed findings and report drafts.

The remainder of the report will provide context to understand the Black jobs crisis and how it relates to this moment; provide an overview of the participants work conditions; share the experiences of Black workers during COVID-19 categorized into **1)** discriminatory push-out, **2)** inaccessible worker supports, and **3)** a lack of worker care infrastructure. Finally, the report will conclude with a summary of recommendations based on participant demands.

Executive Summary

Our current moment in the COVID-19 pandemic is triggering an economic restructure that is contributing to the 21st century Black jobs crisis. Nearly 40,000 Southern California Black workers were engaged, and 2,000 completed the survey, sharing their work experiences, challenges, and demands for support during the COVID-19 pandemic. What they shared revealed the impacts of a long history of anti-Black economic restructures whose negative effects are disproportionately felt by Black workers, creating a Black jobs crisis. This long-standing crisis is characterized by disproportionate unemployment, underemployment, and systemic racism. We see the symptoms of the Black jobs crisis every day: bad jobs, forced migration, unsafe and discriminatory workplace practices, occupational displacement, and more.



Black workers graciously and bravely shared some of their lowest moments, deepest struggles, and biggest challenges of working while living through a global pandemic. The challenges are clear: an unaddressed Black jobs crisis, discriminatory practices pushing workers out of employment, insufficient systemic support, and inadequate care infrastructure at work. It took 13 years after the Great Recession for Black unemployment levels to recover, mostly due to broad and "race-neutral" strategies. Our government at all levels must not make that mistake again. Black workers need specialized programming, as well as intentional relief and recovery resources, to ensure that recovery for Black workers is thorough, equitable, and timely.

The Unaddressed Black Jobs Crisis

- 70% of those who experienced job loss were still looking for work at the time of surveying, over a year into the pandemic.
- 60% of participants reported a 2020 personal income of under \$50,000, which includes those who remained employed.

- Over 50% of the Black workers surveyed reported working in essential or frontline sectors pre-pandemic.
- 50% of the Black workers surveyed experienced some form of work disruption (lay-offs, terminations, and/or furloughs) since the start of the pandemic.

Discriminatory Practices Pushing Black Workers Out of Employment

- About a third of Black workers reported experiencing prejudice or discrimination at work during the pandemic.
- Of those who experienced prejudice or discrimination, 45% were laid off or terminated and 16% were furloughed. Many believed this was related to instances of prejudice or discrimination.

Insufficient Systemic Support

- 71% of on-site workers were concerned about their safety due to the potential for COVID-19 exposure on the job.
- The majority of surveyed workers were unaware of both long-standing and COVID-19-specific worker rights and protections, in part due to the lack of mechanisms for 'Know Your Rights'-style training targeted at Black workers.
- The majority of surveyed workers reported low compliance with on-site COVID-19 safety regulations (PPE, social distancing, time for hand-washing, etc.)
- 33% reported being unsure of their ability to pay for food in the month after surveying, and 28% of those surveyed reported housing challenges largely due to loss of income (or another household member's loss of income).
- 25% reported difficulties navigating the Unemployment Insurance system.



Lack of Care Infrastructure in the Workplace

- 90% of Black women surveyed had some increase in at-home responsibilities including childcare, household chores, elderly care, care for a sick family member or roommate, and financial responsibility. Many of their employers were inflexible to accommodate these increased responsibilities.
- On a scale of 1-5, 80% of respondents rated their stress level 3 or higher. Even more alarming, 60% of Black women rated their stress level 4 or 5 on a scale of 1-5 compared to 52% of Black men.

- 30% of those surveyed had coworkers test positive for COVID-19 to their knowledge, but many more shared their employer did not share positive case numbers.
- The added burden of seeking their own PPE and lack of care negatively impacted workers' well-being.

We asked Black workers, with their collective wisdom and experience, to recommend ways that employers and all levels of government could better support them. Their recommendations fell into three categories: 1) long-term economic support and help with basic needs, 2) targeted worker wellness programming, and 3) targeted workforce rights and development programming. These recommendations have been summarized in context of the regional, state, and federal labor policy contexts.

To an Equitable Recovery: Recommendations

Long-Term Economic Support and COVID-19 Recovery Programming

Regional:

- **Support Black workers to navigate the myriad of systems that create the California social safety net.** Our findings suggest that funding community-based organizations (CBOs) to serve as system navigators for Black workers would help.

State:

- **Strengthen social safety net programmatic capacity to be responsive to Black workers' immediate needs.** This includes but is not limited to increasing the administrative capacity of the California Labor and Workforce Development Agency, Department of Housing and Community Development, and Department of Social Services to address the long-term impact of economic injustice. This will help those programs be more responsive to Black workers' immediate needs.
- **Fund grassroots Black community and worker organizations for long-term COVID-19 recovery programming.** This includes setting aside funds to make PPE and COVID-19 testing directly available to workers, as well as funding for continued worker education on various COVID-19-related worker rights, protections, and resources. Our findings show that Black workers are already behind in recovery with limited access to direct workplace protection services, particularly outside of the metro urban areas. Without intentional and targeted COVID-19 recovery support, recovery for Black workers will take over a decade.
- **Lower administrative barriers to encourage greater Black community-based and worker organization engagement in state funding sources, so resources can better reach Black workers.** By lowering the administrative barriers, removing the reimbursement model, and creating uncomplicated documentation, more Black-led organizations would be able to participate.

Federal:

- **Pass federal legislation and target support for Black workers. This legislation should include childcare funds, paid family leave, and home care.** Black workers shared an overwhelming urgency for wellness support due to the increased demands and stress caused by the pandemic, which has exacerbated the ongoing Black jobs crisis. This recommendation is a vital and actionable piece of care infrastructure that will improve worker wellness.
- **Update Executive Order (E.O.) 11246.** An update of E.O. 11246 will create a federal standard for the inclusion of Black workers, among other workers of color and women, in federally funded projects that provide good jobs.
- **Continue to disperse COVID-19 relief funds as the pandemic continues** to address Black workers' overrepresentation in unemployment throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Raise minimum wage standards.** Raising the wage floor, especially in essential industries with high concentrations of Black workers, would raise income levels for Black workers and create long-term gains.



Support Black Worker Wellness

Regional

- **Expand local human and civil rights offices across the Southern California region.** With an expansion and full resourcing of local human and civil rights offices in the Southern California region, workers will have a local resource to support them as they hold their employers accountable for discrimination.

State

- **Address racism as a workplace hazard.** Define racism as a workplace health and safety issue with the California Division of Occupational Safety and Health (Cal/OSHA). Cal/OSHA's role is to protect workers' health and safety from toxins that kill, and discrimination has had deadly impacts for Black workers.
- **California Labor Workforce Development Agency establishes equity target populations and designates Black workers as a targeted population.** This will work to address workplace exclusion, occupational segregation, and exploitation that fuels the Black jobs crisis cascading into disproportionate levels of homelessness, incarceration, displacement, and health disparities. This includes a need for strategic enforcement in low-wage and gig sectors that employ Black workers, as well as broader data collection and analysis by the agency on the Black jobs crisis. The failure to identify Black workers as a target population in service delivery has resulted in fewer investments and strategic initiatives dedicated to moving the needle on the Black jobs crisis. LWDA should also fund Black-led organizations to both train employers and labor agencies

on racism and anti-Blackness, and provide trauma-informed worker wellness workshops for Black workers.

- **The Department of Fair Employment and Housing (DFEH) invests in workshare agreements with the local Civil Rights offices.** These agreements would allow for DFEH and the local offices to investigate and adjudicate cases of discrimination, expanding boots-on-the-ground efforts.
- **California Department of Health Care Services must increase the availability and accessibility of mental health and wellness services for Black workers.** Increasing the access and avenues for Black workers to access culturally competent mental health professionals is an explicit need shared by Black workers.

Federal

- **Pass legislation that shortens the workweek and requires employers to provide mental health and family/community health days to workers.** Giving Black workers time to rest and recover, through a shortened workweek and mental health days has been shown in pilot studies to support overall worker wellness.ⁱ

Direct Workers' Rights Training and Workforce Development Funding to Black Workers

Regional

- **Set aside regional workforce development funds to pilot public employment benefit programs to build quality job pathways.** There is a long tradition in the Black community of public sector jobs providing quality work with family-sustaining wages.ⁱⁱ Given the large amount of job-loss this will expand access to quality careers in the public sector and must include a support system to ensure Black workers will be successful in these public sector jobs.

State

- **Fund Black Worker Centers to develop and implement robust mechanisms for 'Know Your Rights' training and resources** similar to the COVID Workplace Outreach Project. The majority of Black workers surveyed were not aware of long-standing worker rights and protections. Black Worker Centers are well-positioned to create culturally relevant training and share 'Know Your Rights' and other worker protection resources. As many Black working families are migrating to rural and suburban areas, Black Worker Centers in those areas must also have access to funding so they can meet the needs of local Black workers.

Federal

- **Fund workforce development and training for Black workers** by investing in apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs at the state and community level. These types of programs and other workforce development strategies, like the High Road Training Partnerships, introduce more equitable systems for Black workers by providing direct entry pathways into apprenticeship positions on the project. This can also be used as an opportunity to leveraging positive change by companies pledging racial justice to establish racially just pathways for Black workers.



This current negative economic restructuring can become a positive reconstruction effort to create meaningful working conditions and realities for Black workers and communities. This is an opportunity to avoid the mistakes that were made after the Great Recession that failed to support Black workers. This is a moment to center Black workers, their rights, their protections, and their needs as we chart a path forward.

"Not everything that is faced can be changed. But nothin can be changed until it is faced," wrote the late James Baldwin.

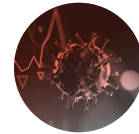
Introduction



“Workers are not just ‘bodies.’ They are human beings with lives, responsibilities, and other external factors that do not revolve around their jobs and should be treated as such.”



- A BLACK WOMAN IN HER LATE 30S WHO LIVES IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY. SHE WORKS IN THE SPORTS AND ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY.



When health and news organizations around the world began reporting on COVID-19 in early 2020, Black Californians were still operating within an economic landscape that did not value nor protect their lives. The multi-generational Black jobs crisis, characterized by high underemployment, unemployment, and stagnant wages, existed in all of the four Southern California counties that are the focus of this report: Los Angeles, San Bernardino, Riverside, and San Diego.^{iv} This Essential Stories report aims to document the experiences, challenges, and demands of the nearly 2,000 Black workers in these counties during the COVID-19 pandemic. The previously quoted worker sums up the sentiments of the Black workers surveyed.

The unaddressed and pre-pandemic Black jobs crisis have led Black workers to experience unemployment and underemployment at higher rates, key factors that increase someone’s likelihood to experience poverty, food insecurity, houselessness, and incarceration. This was true before the COVID-19 pandemic and remains soberingly true as we navigate our way through it.

Black people are 12% of the U.S. population, but are also^{vi}



40% of the US homeless population^{vii}



24% of the population in poverty^{viii}



38% of the U.S. prison population^{ix}



24% of the US food insecure population^x

What is true for Black workers across the country in regards to unemployment, housing insecurity, food insecurity, and criminalization remains true for the 2.2 million Black people in California.^{xi} California has the fifth largest Black population in the country by total population size and over 60% of the Black population in California live in Southern California.^{xii} Even these concentrations allude to the impacts of the forced migration Black workers have experienced. Public sector and quality blue-collar jobs brought millions of Black workers and their families to Los Angeles in the mid-1900s. The economic restructures of the late 1900s caused decades of unemployment, underemployment, and stagnant wages. This, coupled with the increased cost of living in Southern California, is displacing many historically Black neighborhoods, and many of those families are seeking more affordable housing in the Inland Empire and suburban areas of San Diego County. Our focus on these four counties allows this report to paint a regional picture of Black workers' experiences during COVID-19 within the context of forced migration of Black workers, families, and communities.

This pre-existing Black jobs crisis and all of its sobering impacts increase Black Californians' vulnerability to preventable diseases, and COVID-19 exacerbates these conditions.^{xiii} So, on March 11th, 2020 when the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic, the same themes of high rates of unemployment, underemployment, and lack of worker protections only got worse for Black workers, while also adding the new risks of exposure to COVID-19. These economic trends contribute to the broader public health, housing, wellness, and food trends we've seen disproportionately impact Black communities during this pandemic. Workers shared the following when asked about any housing challenges they had experienced during the pandemic.



"Yes, my income decreased dramatically once COVID-19 hit. Then I caught COVID-19 [and I was] unable to catch up on my rent. I was evicted in February [2021 and am] currently homeless."

- A BLACK WOMAN IN HER MID-40S WHO IS CURRENTLY UNEMPLOYED AND LIVES IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY. SHE WORKED IN THE HEALTHCARE AND SOCIAL SERVICES INDUSTRY BEFORE THE PANDEMIC BEGAN.



"My son wound up having severe mental health issues and was hospitalized, and I was evicted from my home. In the midst of that, I was partially laid off to half-time and had to scramble to find a full-time position."

- A BLACK WOMAN IN HER EARLY 50S WHO LIVES IN SAN DIEGO COUNTY AND WORKS IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR.



"I have COVID-19 and had to distance myself from family and friends. I make minimum wage. I'm on child support and have responsibilities for my son. I had to sleep in my car for a few days and pay for hotels."

- A BLACK MAN IN HIS MID-30S WHO LIVES IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY AND WORKS IN THE GIG ECONOMY.





"I was homeless in the beginning of the pandemic, and about a week after, I got another car with the car payment. I ended up getting a call for the apartment that I am in now, but with my hours fluctuating, it is difficult to keep up with payments."

- A BLACK WOMAN IN HER LATE 30S WHO LIVES IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY AND WORKS IN THE HEALTHCARE AND SOCIAL SERVICES SECTOR.



*"Yes **we were already homeless**, but when COVID-19 happened, it has become very hard to find a place. There aren't as many places for rent and the **qualifications have increased making it almost impossible to qualify.**"*



- A BLACK WOMAN IN HER EARLY 30S WHO LIVES IN LOS ANGELES AND WORKS IN THE HEALTHCARE AND SOCIAL SERVICES SECTOR.

This data underscores the need for Black worker voices, perspectives, and messages in labor spaces because the lack thereof led to the conditions and experiences unearthed in this research. Black workers who participated in this survey do not want to see another repeat of past recovery efforts that left them behind with no targeted support. Because of broad and "race-neutral" strategies utilized after the Great Recession, it took 13 years for Black unemployment levels to recover to the pre-Great Recession levels.



Black workers are the center and heart of this report, and none of this would be possible without their contributions and time. The goal of this report is to amplify the voices of nearly two thousand Southern California Black workers. Due to the exorbitant state budget surplus and the general invisibility of Black workers, it is more vital than ever that Black workers' essential stories are seen, heard, and understood to prompt action from decision-makers. We hope the readers of this study walk away with the knowledge that

Black workers' needs are not being met and that recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic must include recovery from the Black jobs crisis. We are sounding the alarm for policymakers. If Black community needs are not met, we will lose more loved ones, more opportunities for progress, and more chances to economically recover from the crisis that is COVID-19.

Setting the Context: Economic Landscape

“I felt like if I did not continue working [in person] during the pandemic that I would not have a job to come back to as a Black worker. That’s why I continued to do my job.”

- A BLACK WOMAN IN HER EARLY 50S WHO LIVES IN SAN BERNARDINO AND WORKS IN SOCIAL SERVICES

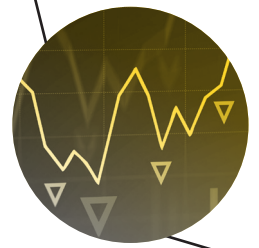


Under the weight of both COVID-19 and the Black jobs crisis, California Black workers are in the midst of an anti-Black economic restructure. Economic restructuring refers to how “the transformations in the composition and locational patterns of the economy [assume] specific forms in cities and urban hierarchy,” which may occur at the detriment of low-wage workers.^{xiv} Figure 1 on the next page provides a timeline of other economic restructures the U.S. has undergone. This current restructure triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic continues to be fueled by the Black jobs crisis, from bad jobs and forced migration to unsafe and anti-Black workplace practices and occupational displacement. All of this accelerates push-out migration, displacement, and exclusion in the workplace, coupled with racial fatigue and stress caused by the racial violence and disproportionate death experienced during COVID-19. Anti-blackness is used to refer to the specific kind of system and interpersonal racial prejudice and discrimination directed towards Black people specifically.^{xv} This emerging, multidimensional crisis in the face of COVID-19 has exacerbated the current disparities in housing, health, and work, in which Black families already hold an immoral share of the state’s unemployment, homelessness, and prison populations.^{xvixvixviii}



The origins of the U.S. economy marks the beginning of the Black jobs crisis and the inhumane values that undergird the U.S. economy with capitalism continuing to de-stabilize the U.S. Workforce. Events and crises from the Industrial Revolution and the Civil War to the New Deal and deindustrialization of the 1980s restructured the economy in their own ways. At every restructure, Black workers have always fought, advocated, and organized for their human and civil rights and well-being. In some instances, Black workers won huge victories for themselves and their communities, and in other instances, Black workers were actively excluded from the benefits of the restructures. Despite demands from Black workers throughout history, there have not been many meaningful, targeted support efforts to compensate for years of explicit exclusion. More recently, trends show that Black workers have been implicitly excluded from restructure benefits, which we hope to further underscore with this report.

FIGURE 1: ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURES AND BLACK WORKERS TIMELINE



1619 - 1619

Marked the beginning of the use of enslaved African labor to prop up an agrarian economy.

1800s

The late 1800s The brief period of Reconstruction that saw Black folks' contributions to the economy.

1900s

1929-1939 - The Great Depression.

1939 - 1945 World War II revitalized the American economy. The defense industry develops and holds ground in the West, leading to a new migration pathway for Black workers from the South. White soldiers returning home benefitted from the GI Bill, helping to support white families post-war.

The 1960s-1990s - Deindustrialization shifts good, blue-collar jobs away from the U.S. Austerity, trickle-down economics, and welfare reform shrink social safety nets for all who need it and disproportionately affects Black workers.

2000s - 2020

Black workers kept moving despite massive challenges. In the early 2000s, Black workers were beginning to see some economic gains, until the 2007-2009 Great Recession created more setbacks. During the Great Recession, and many other economic and natural disasters, Black workers weren't strategically targeted in recovery resources, so they were often the first to be let go and the last to find new work opportunities.

Black workers who were concentrated in the public sector were let go as austerity measures were put into place and government services were outsourced. The occurrence of contract work and gig work ticked up as private companies attempted to recover from the financial crisis. **Only in January 2020 did the Black unemployment rate fall to pre-Great Recession numbers, 13 years later.** This 13-year recovery from 2007 still left Black workers with the highest unemployment rate compared to other groups. This extremely slow recovery is illustrative of the long-standing challenges and barriers that exist for Black workers. By January 2020, Black workers were slowly regaining employment, even though they still faced disproportionately high unemployment rates.

1700s

The mid-1700s- mid-1800s The industrial revolution cleared the way for the U.S. economy to be based around industry rather than agriculture, contributing to what would unfold as the Civil War.

The early 1900s - The Spanish Flu contributed to the ending of World War I. Workers organized for the five-day workweek.

1933-1937 - The New Deal cascaded into generational wealth for millions of white families and got many of them back to work, while Black families were left out.

The 1950s-1960s - Civil Rights Movement pushed for the inclusion of Black folks in all aspects of life, such as blue collar and public sector jobs with protected career paths, voting rights, and so much more.

In 1996, Proposition 209 passed and amended the state constitution to prohibit state government agencies from considering race, sex, or ethnicity specifically in the areas of public employment, public contracting, and public education. This created challenges for California to explicitly target Black workers in the aforementioned programs.

2020 - NOW

Much of the gains made in the 13 year recovery process from the Great Recession were quickly wiped away within the first few months of the COVID-19 pandemic. The economic fallout from the pandemic began to trigger economic restructuring across many industries, causing unprecedented amounts of unemployment and underemployment. Concurrently, during this time the news of the deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, and Breonna Taylor sparked a racial justice reckoning with massive global protests supporting the Black Lives Matter movement. Many individuals, organizations, governments, and companies made blanket statements acknowledging the tragic deaths that sparked the reckoning. However, we have yet to see concrete commitment to racial justice from these institutions.

While this particular pandemic is new and unique to our current times, the processes of economic restructuring that leave Black workers behind is what sustains the Black jobs crisis. If these issues are not addressed in COVID-19 economic recovery efforts, Black workers will effectively be abandoned in crisis while others move on.

The Black workers who participated in the Essential Stories survey knew they needed targeted, long-term economic support to build stability and community. While COVID-19 has presented its own unique challenges, the support that Black workers have requested from various levels of government, non-profits, and CBOs were needed long before COVID-19. Below are some examples of what Black workers reported in this survey.



"Some compassion and understanding that this is unlike anything we've dealt with in our country since polio."

- A BLACK MAN IN HIS EARLY 50S WHO IS LIVING IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY. HE IS UNEMPLOYED AND WAS FORMERLY IN THE ENTERTAINMENT SECTOR.



"Any and all help was needed and would've been [appreciated]."

- A BLACK WOMAN IN HER EARLY 40S WHO LIVES IN LOS ANGELES AND WORKS IN THE CHILDCARE SECTOR.

"PPE, stimulus cash, health recommendations, extra unemployment insurance, childcare, elder care, remote work opportunities, laws to provide for worker safety, free testing and vaccination, laws against violating safety protocols, protections for the incarcerated."

- A BLACK MAN IN HIS EARLY 40S WHO LIVES IN LOS ANGELES AND WORKS IN THE TECH INDUSTRY.

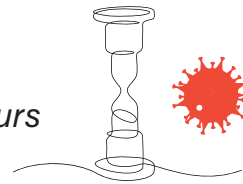


This report serves as a space to once again amplify what Black workers need to survive this multidimensional disaster. The Black jobs crisis set the stage for the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the livelihoods of Black workers in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, Riverside, and San Diego counties. While the impacts of these compounding crises are sobering and heavy, they are also cause for urgent, targeted, and equitable recovery that specifically supports Black workers.

Our economy will never look the same as it did before the pandemic. Our society is in a restructuring, and we have two paths available: either perpetuate anti-Blackness in governmental systems and do nothing to get back to a 'normal' where Black workers are still in crisis, or provide the targeted support Black workers need to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and the Black jobs crisis.

COVID-19 Employment Status

“I don't have as many working hours as I used to, and I don't have as much overtime.”



- A BLACK WOMAN IN HER EARLY 30S WHO IS LIVING IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY AND WORKS IN THE RETAIL SECTOR.

Black workers were deeply affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. This section will share the pandemic's impacts on the employment status and income of the surveyed respondents.

Approximately 95% of the participants reported being employed at the start of California's Stay at Home orders in March 2020. This trend is slightly better than the 2019 Black unemployment rates in the target counties, which were 8% for Los Angeles, 10% for San Bernardino, 8% for Riverside, and 10% for San Diego.^{xxiii} However, this was still higher than the 2019 white unemployment rate for the state, which was 3%.^{xxiv}

Employment and Sectors

Figure 2: Number of Jobs Before COVID 19 (March 2020)

NUMBER OF JOBS	
0	5%
1	70%
2	17%
3+	8%

As seen in Figure 3, before the March 2020 Stay at Home orders, the participants largely worked in healthcare, social services, education, food service and grocery, retail, and transportation. Most of these sectors were categorized as essential sectors that remained open throughout the pandemic, which meant that these essential workers were some of the most vulnerable to exposure to COVID-19. At the time of surveying over a year into the pandemic, these sectors remained the top five for those who were employed. The top five sectors roughly remained the same across regions as well.



Figure 3: Employment sectors before March 2020 and at the time of surveying

NUMBER OF JOBS	PRE-COVID-19	AT THE TIME OF SURVEYING
Healthcare and Social Services	18%	21%
Education	12%	13%
Food Service and Grocery	11%	8%
Retail	10%	11%
Transportation	10%	11%
Self-employed	7%	6%
Construction	7%	8%
Warehouse	6%	7%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	5%	2%
Administrative and Support Services	3%	3%
Entertainment Arts Recreation	3%	1%
Janitorial	2%	2%
Other Public Sector	2%	3%
Non-profit	1%	1%
Other	3%	2%

Many of the sectors, like food service, retail, warehousing, and janitorial, are known to be low-wage, unregulated, and exploitative of their workers.^{xxv} There have long been calls to transform the low-wage labor market in order to improve the quality of all jobs available to Black workers. This need was made even more urgent in the pandemic.

Job Loss and Income Impacts

Even though the majority of participants worked in essential sectors before the onset of COVID-19, nearly 50% of the participants experienced work disruptions like lay-offs, terminations, or furloughs since March 2020. Lay-offs and furloughs occurred more than terminations. These distinctions have important implications for the workers' abilities to apply for and claim unemployment benefits. In California, workers who have been terminated cannot claim unemployment benefits, but workers who have been furloughed can.

Figure 4: Work disruptions since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic

WORK DISRUPTIONS	
Laid off	21%
Terminated	13%
Furloughed	16%

Of those who were laid off or terminated, **only 32% were able to secure employment again at the time of surveying.**

Figure 5: Employment transition for laid off or terminated workers

EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION	
Gained employment again	32%
Still looking for work	68%

Approximately 60% of participants reported a personal income of under \$50,000 for the year 2020, and 25% reported below \$25,000. Figure 6 categorizes by the type of work disruption, with those who experienced job loss reporting slightly lower than 2020 yearly incomes. As will be explained further, these income levels are well below the California low income threshold. Workers like the one quoted below experienced work disruptions that impacted their income in 2020.

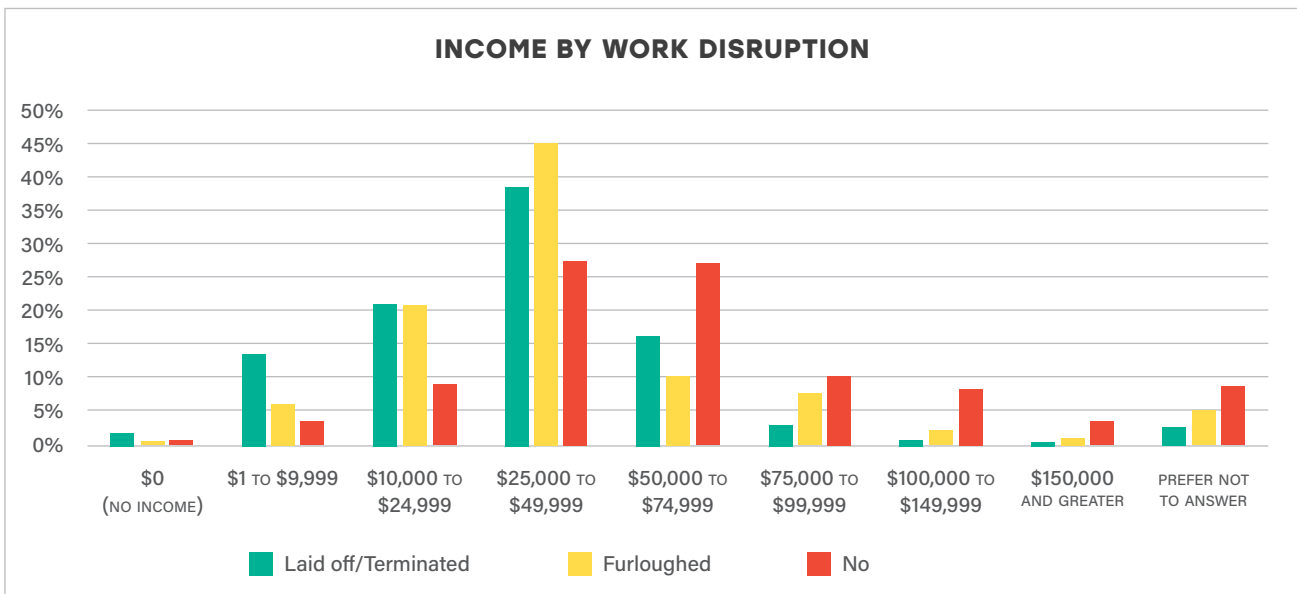


"I was furloughed from my sales role...at the end of July 2020. At the time I was hitting my goals and meeting their performance expectations. There were several people on my team [who] were not hitting their goals and those people were not placed on furlough. I was so insulted by their actions, as I had been a top performer for years. I sought out a new job...and started working there 9/27/20."



- A BLACK WOMAN IN HER LATE 30S WHO IS LIVING IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY AND WORKS IN THE REAL ESTATE SECTOR.

Figure 6: 2020 self-reported income



To better contextualize the income data from the survey, it is useful to look at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) income limits and how they define low-income. These limits are county-specific to consider housing and other living costs specific to the county. For example, according to HUD, a single resident living by themselves in Los Angeles is considered low-income if they make under \$63,100 due to the high cost of living. Therefore, that person would be eligible for certain affordable housing units. The table below provides the 2020 HUD low-income limits for households of one person and those of four people across the four counties.^{xxvi} While this survey did not collect household data, the majority of our survey respondents are considered low-income for their area.

Figure 7: 2020 self-reported income^{xxvii}

	ESSENTIAL STORIES MEDIAN 2020 REPORTED PERSONAL INCOME	2020 HUD LOW-INCOME LIMIT FOR HOUSEHOLD OF 1	2020 HUD LOW-INCOME LIMIT FOR HOUSEHOLD OF 4
Los Angeles	<\$50,000	<\$63,100	<\$90,100
Riverside		<\$52,700	<\$60,250
San Bernardino		<\$52,700	<\$60,250
San Diego		<\$64,700	<\$92,400

Source: California Department of Housing and Community Development State Income Limits for 2020 Memorandum.

Other research continues to note the inequitable employment impact of COVID-19 on Black workers. Black workers continued to hold the highest unemployment rates as the country reached unprecedented levels of unemployment.^{xxviii} Temporary pandemic-related layoffs turned into permanent layoffs for Black workers more often than white workers.^{xxix} Once unemployed, Black workers had one of the lowest transition rates—slightly above half—to gaining new employment compared to white and Latinx workers, whose transition rates averaged at about two-thirds.^{xxx} Other research found that Black workers were two times more likely to experience retaliation from their employers if they spoke up about pandemic-related concerns than if white workers did the same.^{xxxi} Past economic recovery efforts have skipped over Black workers in part as a result of the limitations caused by Proposition 209 and outdated U.S. policies mandating diversity and inclusion like E.O. 11246. **Resources need to be targeted towards populations disproportionately experiencing unemployment and underemployment, and these findings reveal that Black workers are a target population that has been overlooked in the past.**

The participants are Black workers with career hopes, families, and communities. Long-standing economic insecurity, coupled with unprecedented job loss during the COVID-19 pandemic, impacts every part of their lives. Grounded in the experiences that our survey participants have graciously shared, the remainder of this report will highlight how challenging work environments, lack of systemic working-class support, and threats to their well-being have affected Black workers in the pandemic.

Pushed Out and Excluded at Work



"He made me feel like, you're Black, so you don't matter."

- A BLACK MAN IN HIS EARLY 30S WHO LIVES IN LOS ANGELES AND WORKS IN THE FOOD SERVICE AND GROCERY SECTOR



Our survey found that Black workers feel pushed out and excluded at work. Many of them experience what other research has called a "trust deficit" as a result of not feeling heard, valued, or supported at work, which has led to a heightened emotional burden on Black workers.^{xxxii} When Black workers go to work, they have to navigate the additional burden of othering and anti-Black behavior. So while not all Black workers have been pushed out through lay-offs or furloughs, many feel pushed out by their environments. This section will review what our surveyed workers reported about discrimination and prejudice while working during the pandemic.

Discrimination and Job Loss

Black workers consistently reported having to deal with anti-Blackness at work and often connected these experiences to their job loss.

Figure 8: Prejudice or discrimination at work during the pandemic



Of those who experienced prejudice or discrimination, 45% were laid off or terminated, and 16% were furloughed. In the daily lives of Black workers, the consequence of anti-Blackness during a pandemic is often their livelihood.

About half of those laid off, furloughed, or terminated felt that it was directly related to the discrimination they experienced on the job. One respondent shared the following:



"I'm not sure if it was prejudice, but my position was terminated [due to] the COVID-19. Another compliance agent that came after me kept her position. She did not have as much knowledge as I did, but she continued with the company. I feel like they just wanted me out, so COVID-19 was a way to get rid of me without my contesting it."

- A BLACK WOMAN IN HER MID-40S WHO LIVES IN LOS ANGELES AND IS UNEMPLOYED. BEFORE COVID-19, SHE WORKED IN COMPLIANCE FOR A PROPERTY MANAGEMENT COMPANY.

Similar to this worker, many routinely alluded to employers using COVID-19 as an excuse to get rid of them without contestation.



"I was the first [to] be let go out of my [department] because I was the only Black [person] there."

- A BLACK WOMAN IN HER EARLY 50S WHO LIVES IN SAN BERNARDINO. SHE IS CURRENTLY UNEMPLOYED AND USED TO WORK IN HEALTHCARE AND SOCIAL SERVICES.



"I worked for a company that is 90% white. I left a job in Georgia where I was employed for over 12 years to work for this company. [The] COVID-19 lockdown hit only after I was employed for three months. My position was terminated after I was employed by this company for seven months. Since companies were receiving federal assistance to maintain jobs, the company did not utilize this option. I was willing to go the extra distance to keep my job, but I was not given the opportunity."

- A BLACK MAN IN HIS EARLY 60S WHO LIVES IN SAN DIEGO. HE IS UNEMPLOYED AND USED TO WORK IN HEALTHCARE AND SOCIAL SERVICES.



For many workers, the only differentiating factor between themselves and other workers was their Blackness. These workers shared similar experiences.

"I was let go because of my race. Being the only Black (African American) worker, I was the only one forced to leave."



- A BLACK MAN IN HIS EARLY 30S WHO LIVES IN LOS ANGELES. HE IS UNEMPLOYED AND USED TO WORK IN THE FOOD SERVICE AND GROCERY SECTOR.



"I had the opportunity of working at [a boutique non-union grocery store]. My work was extremely undervalued, even if I kept asking for more work to do, and I had to prove twice as much that I was capable of doing the job. It felt like they intentionally chose to ignore me. I [wore a] tie scarf to work because of my 4c hair [tightly coiled hair], and I was told I don't dress appropriately because of that. My coworkers would [intentionally] offend me and when I finally spoke I was told I was making assumptions. The manager turned the situation around and told me I have a snippy attitude. Two weeks after I spoke up, I was fired."

- A BLACK WOMAN IN HER EARLY 20S WHO LIVES IN LOS ANGELES. SHE IS UNEMPLOYED AND USED TO WORK IN THE FOOD SERVICE AND GROCERY SECTOR.

Ultimately, for the Black workers who experienced work disruptions, the reasons were not only linked to COVID-19 economic fallouts but discrimination as well. For the Black workers who were not pushed out during COVID-19, many still shared feelings of exclusion.

Discrimination and Exclusion

Not only was 2020 the year that the COVID-19 pandemic transformed the world, but it was also the year that people all over the world protested, demonstrated, and organized to address anti-Blackness. The murder of George Floyd at the hands of Derek Chauvin and the Minneapolis Police Department sparked deeper conversations with non-Black communities about the specific and often violent ways that racism towards Black people shows up in our world. Throughout all of this, Black workers, many of whom were essential workers, still had to go to work in the midst of racial terror, violence, and a global pandemic.

As we've shown in this report, the systemic violence of anti-Blackness is not always physical—it is also psychological. A study titled "Last Hired, First Fired? Black-White Unemployment and the Business Cycle" explains that Black workers are some of the initial workers fired at the start of a recession.^{xxxiii} Black workers feel they are not welcomed nor included in networking that can increase their career opportunities. Black workers encounter unwelcoming environments that lack a sense of belonging, trust, and respect, in corporate America while also being passed over for growth opportunities.^{xxxivxxxv} This worker illustrates a way it shows up in their life.

“My supervisor is more inclined to not respect the opinions of Black women. He goes out of his way to belittle me. If the whites or Hispanics have an idea or suggestions, he gives them public praise. With me, my colleagues say I have great ideas, but he not only ignores mine but gossips about me later to the receptionist.”

- A BLACK WOMAN IN HER EARLY 50S WHO LIVES IN LOS ANGELES AND WORKS IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR.

Black workers in leadership positions are not exempt from these types of experiences, as demonstrated by this worker's story:

“I am the only Black female...This job is remote but you experience some of the same things like the lack of diversity. Sometimes, especially in the leadership roles, there's not much diversity there. And it tends to allow for unbalanced treatment in the workplace...Sometimes for the Black worker (just speaking from my own experience), if you make a mistake or an error was made on your part, it's highlighted. You're made to feel as if you just ruined everything. I've seen the Black worker being treated differently...I have a situation right now where one of the co-workers doesn't want to follow my leadership. She has a problem with it. I'm lead of maybe about six employees. And out of those six, there's one woman that feels that she should be in my position...**It's the most hostile, uncomfortable, and awkward feeling when you want to work as a team, and there's someone that feels you don't belong there.**”

- ANONYMOUS WORKER PARTICIPANT IN THE ANCHOR ORGANIZATIONS' BLACK WORKER RIGHTS + WELLNESS LISTENING SESSIONS

This anonymous worker's story unfortunately isn't unique to their experience. Nearly a quarter of our survey respondents reported that they did not feel they were treated with respect or dignity as a Black worker.

Figure 9: Treated with no dignity or respect (could be a 1 in 4 graphic to help break up the text)



The prevalence of these incidents often makes Black workers feel disrespected and not valued as employees. Another worker's story is a prime example.

“It's like this love-hate relationship where it's like, I still love what I do though. I just don't like how I'm being treated. And I've seen a lot of it is because of my race. It's obvious to me now that it is because I'm Black when my white or other ethnic colleagues get these other services. I'm not being included in certain meetings...The only other thing I can think of is that because my work is not valued. Or I as an individual am not valued.”

- MERIEL ANDERSON-MCDADE, WHO WORKS FOR RIVERSIDE COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT AS AN EMPLOYMENT PLACEMENT COORDINATOR. SHE WAS A PARTICIPANT IN THE ANCHOR ORGANIZATIONS' BLACK WORKER RIGHTS + WELLNESS LISTENING SESSIONS.

Meriel's story illustrates the trust deficit often experienced in the workplace. She has a job that she loves, and yet she feels devalued and othered as a Black worker. This emotional burden can negatively impact workers' abilities to thrive inside and outside of work.

Despite the powerful calls for equity and inclusivity in 2020, our findings show that a year later, this has not translated into stable employment and improved work experiences for Black workers. The institutionalized racism in the history of Black work, the instances of implicit and explicit bias, and health disparities have been exacerbated by COVID-19. All together, it has negatively impacted workplace health and safety standards, and it's specifically harming Black workers. This is further explored in the subsequent sections.

The spectrum of experiences that Black workers so graciously shared illuminates how racism and anti-Blackness can make otherwise stable employment precarious, particularly in a moment of economic crisis. The Essential Stories survey findings must compel decision-makers to understand that there is nuance and context behind unemployment and underemployment statistics for Black workers.

Our Essential Stories survey unearthed how anti-Blackness presented itself in the work environment in both covert and overt ways. Whether they are excluded from decision-making Zoom meetings, being paid less, or even being laid off, Black workers' experiences are colored by how others perceive them and their Blackness. As many of the workers reported, the only clear difference between themselves and their other coworkers is their race. While our survey spoke specifically to their work experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, these experiences are a part of a larger history of the anti-Blackness in the workplace that has existed since the inception of this country. However, with thoughtful and strategic intervention, anti-Blackness and discrimination in the workplace can be addressed, making it possible for Black workers to not only recover from the COVID-19 economic restructuring, and even resolve the Black jobs crisis itself.

Insufficient Worker Safety Net

As Black workers are pushed into unemployment, many surveyed found themselves in need of robust working-class and working-poor systemic support. Workplace safety and worker protections, unemployment insurance, stimulus funds, hazard pay, Calfresh (federally known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), and rental and mortgage assistance became crucial. While many state and local agencies expanded their programs to meet this demand, as seen in Figure 10 below, many Black workers surveyed still struggled to access many of these protections, benefits, and services.

Figure 10: Overview COVID-19 related worker rights, protections, and resources

	EXPANDED SUPPORT DURING COVID-19	EXPANSIONS ENACTED	EXPIRATIONS OF EXPANSIONS
California Paid Sick Leave ^{xxxvii}	Not expanded. Ongoing regular or average wage for preceding 90 days for missed work due to diagnosis, care, or treatment of an existing health condition of, or preventive care for, an employee or an employee's family member.	NA (pre-COVID-19)	NA (pre-COVID-19)
California Family Paid Sick Leave	Not expanded. The ongoing policy covers 60-70% of wages for missed work due to the need for family care/bonding from employee contributions.	NA (pre-COVID-19)	NA (pre-COVID-19)
California Covid-19 Supplemental Paid Sick Leave	SPSL offers up to a total of 80 hours of paid leave benefits to full-time employees, and covers paid leave for part-time workers as determined by their schedule, with particular specifications for certain sectors. This covers work missed due to caring for yourself or a family member due to COVID-19, as well as vaccine-related time-off needs.	March 29, 2021 (Enacted April 16th, 2020-December 31, 2020; Renewed on January 1st, 2021st)	September 30, 2021

EXPANDED SUPPORT DURING COVID-19		EXPANSIONS ENACTED	EXPIRATIONS OF EXPANSIONS
Federal Emergency Paid Family & Medical Leave ^{xxxviii}	Covered employers are required to provide employees up to 10 weeks of paid leave and two weeks unpaid leave when caring for a child, whose school or place of care is closed or childcare provider is unavailable related to COVID-19 reasons.	April 1, 2020	December 31, 2020
Federal Emergency Paid Sick Leave ^{xxxix}	Covered employers are required to provide employees up to 10 days or an equivalent of 80 hours maximum for missed work due to specific qualifying reasons related to COVID-19.	April 1, 2020	December 31, 2020
Cal/OSHA Emergency Temporary Standards ^{xl}	Covered employees are required to be provided, by employers, an effective, and written COVID-19 Prevention Program for better preparation and handling of workplace COVID-19 cases.	November 30, 2020	No expiration date mentioned
Unemployment Insurance ^{xlix}	Unemployed persons may be eligible for unemployment insurance, and four federal provisions were implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic providing additional benefits to those without work, or have reduced hours or services.	February 2, 2020 (the earliest provision, Pandemic Unemployment Assistance)	September 4, 2021 (all four federal provisions)
CalFresh - Pandemic EBT ^{xliixlxiv}	<p>Eligible households may qualify for CalFresh Emergency Allotments to receive additional CalFresh benefits. Due to the 2021 extension, every household receives a minimum of \$95 per month.</p> <p>Eligible children may qualify for Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer and receive benefits, during the school year and summer break, to help families buy food. Benefits are loaded on a card and mailed to recipients, with amounts up to \$375 a month.</p>	<p>Emergency Allotments Approved On March 30, 2020</p> <p>P-EBT approved on April 23, 2020</p>	<p>Emergency Allotments expire on February 26, 2022.</p> <p>P-EBT expires on March 31, 2022.</p> <p>*Both programs may be subject to extensions, as in the past.</p>

	EXPANDED SUPPORT DURING COVID-19	EXPANSIONS ENACTED	EXPIRATIONS OF EXPANSIONS
Housing Assistance <small>xdvixlvixdvixlvixlll</small>	Those who have unstable housing due to the COVID-19 pandemic may be eligible for housing resources, such as eviction protection, rent relief, mortgage forbearance and homeless services. Renter may be protected from eviction until March 31, 2022, after applying for CA COVID-19 Rent Relief, which will pay past and future rent payments, and utility bills. Homeowners and small landlords may be eligible to receive mortgage forbearance if impacted by COVID-19. Project Roomkey provided temporary housing for the unhoused, if eligible.	Eviction Protection - enacted on August 31, 2020 but retroactive to March 2020. CA COVID-19 Rent Relief - implemented in January 2021 but retroactive to April 1, 2020. Mortgage forbearance - approved on December 27, 2020. Project Roomkey- implemented in March 2020 and extended on June 30, 2020.	Eviction Protection - expires on March 31, 2022. CA COVID-19 Rent Relief - expired on September 30, 2021. Mortgage forbearance- expired on September 30, 2021. Project Roomkey- expired on December 31, 2021.

The remainder of this section will detail what Black workers shared about their awareness and experiences in navigating the worker safety nets needed to survive the pandemic.

Worker Protections and Workplace Safety Systems

As mentioned previously, approximately one in three Black workers surveyed were laid off or terminated from their positions during the pandemic, further contributing to centuries of systemic and societal anti-Blackness and exacerbating the Black jobs crisis. Black workers then turned to the systems meant to support them during times of emergency and unemployment.

Worker protections and workplace safety standards were enacted to address the concerns of millions of workers who were on-site during the pandemic. But for these protections and standards to support Black workers, the standards need to be enforced and Black workers need to be made aware of them.



For example, a Black woman from San Bernardino who worked in food service and grocery shared, “Not sure if it was my age or race, but after taking two weeks off for COVID-19 symptoms, I was not allowed to return.”

Those two weeks off should have been covered by the California COVID-19 Supplemental Paid Sick Leave requirements.

Due to the capacity of many labor standard agencies, there often is not much enforcement if workers do not file claims. And for workers to file claims, they need to know they have these rights and standards.

Before the pandemic, there was a serious lack of regional programming that both included comprehensive workers-rights

education and awareness, and specifically targeted Black workers. Unfortunately, this has not improved since the onset of the pandemic. Figure 11 shows the percentage of workers who reported being aware of the respective worker rights and protections available to them. **On average only a third of respondents were aware of their rights as workers, for both pandemic-specific and long-standing protections.** The figure below breaks this down by type of worker resource and by region.

Figure 11: Awareness of the worker rights or protection by region.

	LA	IE	SD
California Paid Sick Leave	51%	50%	50%
California Family Paid Sick Leave	43%	42%	33%
California COVID-19 Supplemental Paid Sick Leave	37%	42%	32%
Federal Emergency Paid Family & Medical Leave	26%	27%	28%
Federal Emergency Paid Sick Leave	19%	29%	26%
Workers Compensation	47%	42%	41%
Unpaid Job Protected Leave	17%	23%	18%
Cal/OSHA COVID-19 Notification Requirements	21%	19%	20%
Disability insurance	33%	29%	24%



As previously discussed, forced migration and displacement of Black communities in Southern California has been going on for decades. The “Black Flight” terminology often used to describe it maliciously mis-characterizes the reality of forced migration and displacement, due in part to job insecurity and the speculative housing market increasing costs.ⁱⁱⁱ According to the findings above, places like the Inland Empire and San Diego have fewer social and community safety nets for Black workers, as well as limited employment opportunities. Thus, Black workers need more equitable and robust regional support across Southern California.

Without any long-standing or state-supported mechanisms for worker rights awareness, Black workers went into the pandemic with little knowledge of their basic rights or of the standards their workplaces were required to uphold. Essential Stories, supported by the COVID-19 Workplace Outreach Project, aimed to fill this gap, but as this data shows, there is a long road ahead to get the awareness of rights and protections to 100% for Black workers.

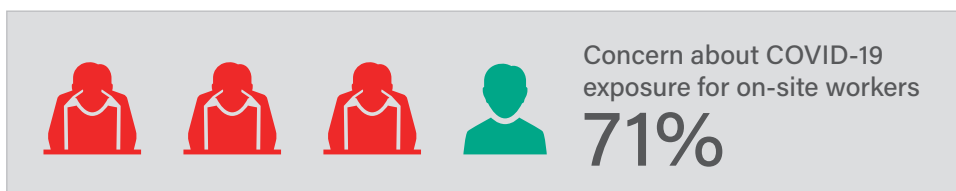
Awareness is only one piece of the puzzle. Despite varying levels of awareness, workers still reported overall low compliance of COVID-19-required safety precautions for on-site work as seen in Figure 12 below. Of those working on-site only about half were provided any sort of personal protective equipment, only about a third were provided COVID-19 health and safety protocols, and only about a quarter were given some sort of hazard pay or paid sick leave. Unfortunately, this experience is not a unique to our survey respondents. The anchor partners reached out to many workers who reported having to provide their own PPE and clean their worksites with their own supplies.


Figure 12: Employer-provided working conditions

EMPLOYER PROVIDES PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT	
All personal protective equipment (mask, face shields, and gloves)	57%
Masks	44%
Gloves	43%
EMPLOYER PROVIDES COVID-19 HEALTH AND SAFETY PROTOCOLS	
Implementing 6 ft. Distance	42%
Cleaning of Workplace Equipment	42%
Cleaning of Worksite	36%
Breaks to Wash Hands	33%
EMPLOYER PROVIDES LEAVE AND PAY	
Paid Sick Leave	42%
Family Sick Leave	27%
Hazard Pay	21%
An Increase in Pay	13%

Even with these supports, 71% of our respondents who worked on-site at the time of surveying reported being concerned about COVID-19 exposure at work. Sadé Williams, a participant in the Essential Stories' Black Worker Rights + Wellness survey, helps put these concerns in perspective.

Figure 13: COVID-19 Exposure Concern Graphic





“During my time there, I experienced a lack of safety concerns expressed from supervisors who would not wear their masks around others. One instance, there was a supervisor who wasn’t wearing their mask during a meeting [with a] room full of people in which the supervisor’s boss, who was present, did not say anything. I spoke up during the meeting in regards to the supervisor not wearing a mask and how uncomfortable it made my coworkers and I feel. I was fired from my position three weeks later without any reason for termination. I have been unemployed since and [am] still looking for work currently.”

- SADÉ WILLIAMS, THE LATE PARTICIPANT IN THE ANCHOR PARTNERS BLACK WORKER RIGHTS + WELLNESS SESSION, WHO PREVIOUSLY WORKED FOR A LOCAL GOVERNMENT EMPLOYER IN THE PARKS AND RECS DEPARTMENT.

Black workers are strongly concerned about COVID-19 infection risks.^{liii} Many respondents expressed similar concerns about not trusting that their employers would adequately implement COVID-19 safety precautions on worksites. One participant in the Essential Stories project shared the following:

“They’re mandating us to come back. But they’re not doing anything different. They’re not going to do plexi[glass]. They did a protocol safety return brochure. But they didn’t go by any of it. They just pacified us.”

- MERIEL ANDERSON-MCDADE, A PARTICIPANT IN THE ANCHOR PARTNERS’ BLACK WORKER RIGHTS + WELLNESS SESSION WHO WORKS FOR RIVERSIDE COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT AS AN EMPLOYMENT PLACEMENT COORDINATOR.

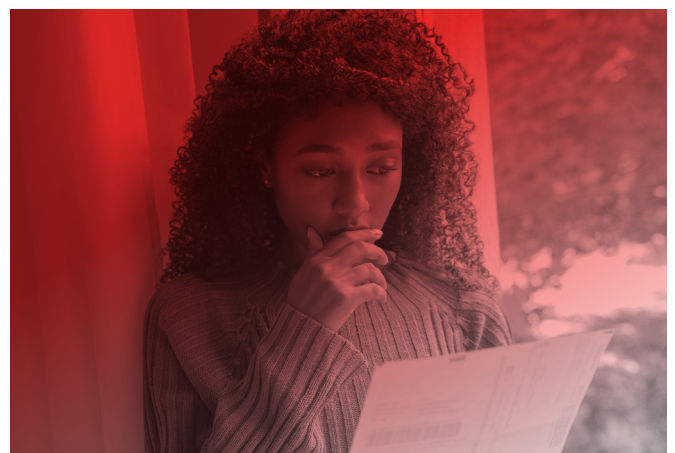
Our participants felt that their workplaces were unsafe, and this feeling has been noted in other research that reported Black workers are more likely to go to work with a fever because they do not have sick leave and cannot afford to miss a day of pay.^{liv} Already experiencing financial hardship, they feared they would fall behind on their bills by missing just a day of work.

Once again, the Black jobs crisis is playing a key role in how Black workers experience the pandemic. Without robust and targeted worker rights outreach to Black workers, this situation will persist indefinitely. Employers are providing inconsistent COVID-19 protections and are not informing their workers of basic worker protections that they are required to uphold. This dangerous scenario puts Black workers in a position to be exploited, risk their health and that of their families, or face unemployment because they do not know about the rights and resources available to them.

Financial Assistance Systems

As unemployment rates have soared to unprecedented levels for all workers, Black workers continue to have the highest unemployment rate among all racial groups nationally, especially Black teenagers.^{lv} This translates to a high need for unemployment insurance. Yet, 25% of our respondents did not apply for benefits purely because the forms were confusing or they did not know how to apply.

The purpose of unemployment insurance is to limit hardship when someone loses their job, allowing



workers to stabilize themselves and, in turn, the economy.^{vi} Among our respondents, only 42% applied for unemployment insurance at some point since March 2020. Of those who applied, 61% were approved and received their funds, but 14% have either not heard back about their claim or encountered a problem when applying. Many workers shared frustrations with the unemployment insurance process.

Figure 14: Outcome of Unemployment Insurance Claims

APPROVED AND RECEIVED THEIR UI FUNDS	APPROVED AND WAITING FOR UI FUNDS	HAVEN'T HEARD BACK OR RAN INTO ANOTHER PROBLEM IN APPLYING	DENIED
61%	18%	14%	7%

"[The] process is cumbersome and at times, [it's] not easy to understand [the] benefits."
 - A BLACK WOMAN IN HER LATE 50S WHO LIVES IN SAN BERNARDINO AND WORKS IN EDUCATION.

"I did not hear anything. It accepted my claim, then said I need to resubmit three different times. I can't get through to anyone at EDD for the January claim when I contracted COVID-19 from work and lost income from both employers."
 - A BLACK WOMAN IN HER LATE 20S WHO LIVES IN LOS ANGELES AND WORKS IN THE HEALTHCARE AND SOCIAL SERVICES SECTOR.

"It took a long time for my funds to be given because I had also applied for medical unemployment since I was having surgery [at] the same time we went on lockdown. I didn't get any funds until July, and I had to go as far as to send a letter to my region's political assembly member to help me."
 - A BLACK TRANSGENDER-IDENTIFYING PERSON IN THEIR EARLY 20S. THEY LIVE IN LOS ANGELES AND WORK IN SALES.

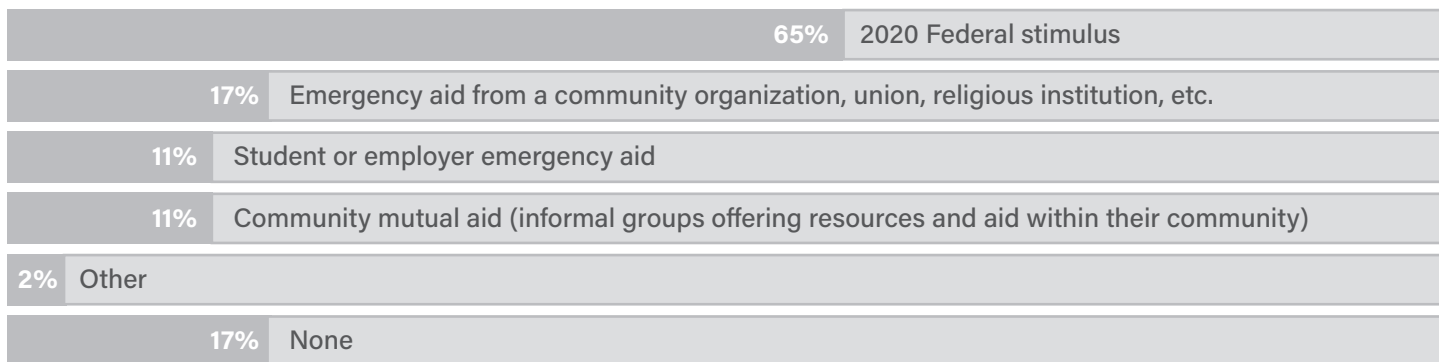
"[I was] approved [and I] received some funds. [I] haven't received unemployment for two months even though I have been sending in my certifications on time."
 - A BLACK TRANSGENDER-IDENTIFYING PERSON IN THEIR 30S WHO LIVES IN LOS ANGELES. THEY ARE CURRENTLY UNEMPLOYED AND USED TO WORK IN EDUCATION.

"I was getting unemployment until recently. Supposedly, all the computer systems are antiquated, and they're updating them. But I haven't received a payment since 3/07/2021."
 - A BLACK WOMAN IN HER EARLY 50S WHO LIVES IN LOS ANGELES. SHE IS UNEMPLOYED AND USED TO WORK IN THE NON-PROFIT FIELD.


Despite higher levels of Black worker unemployment during the pandemic, there is a significant difference nationally between the allocation of unemployment benefits between Black (73%) and white workers (80.2%) from March 2020 to March 2021.^{lvii} Similar to workers' rights, the unemployment insurance system only supports workers if workers can access it. The first quote echoes the sentiments of many participants. Other research also found that in the first month of the pandemic, 37% of Black workers nationwide had trouble navigating the application process.^{lviii} While many Black workers tried to utilize customer service support and access their unemployment insurance, one respondent mentioned that they would have preferred "calling in to hear a live person's voice," but it was challenging to speak to a real person.

While it has been the primary form of consistent financial assistance throughout the pandemic, unemployment insurance does not always meet the needs of all workers or their families. This is especially concerning as survey participants who did *not* experience job loss still reported overwhelmingly low-income levels. Other forms of financial assistance became crucial to fill this gap. 85% of our participants have accessed some form of financial aid during the pandemic. As shown, workers also turned to their communities for financial support during this time. Figure 15 gives a breakdown of the aid accessed by participants.

Figure 15: COVID-19-specific financial aid accessed



As seen, the 2020 federal stimulus checks helped fill a financial assistance gap for many of our Black workers. But, many shared concerns with its amount, the delay, and the need for ongoing financial assistance.

“Better wages for sure because \$2,000 stimulus checks [aren't] enough at all to cover someone's livelihood.” 

- A BLACK TRANS MAN IN THEIR EARLY 20S WHO LIVES IN LOS ANGELES. THEY ARE AN UNEMPLOYED COLLEGE STUDENT WHO LOST THEIR ON-CAMPUS JOB.

“I think in times like these, the federal government should already have help in place and an easy way for people to get the help they need right away. These times are already stressful and to have to wait and wait for aid is absolutely ridiculous.”

- A BLACK WOMAN IN HER MID-50S WHO IS CURRENTLY UNEMPLOYED AND FORMERLY WORKED IN THE HEALTHCARE AND SOCIAL SERVICES SECTOR.

In the United States, there is a long tradition of Black workers turning to, their communities rather than social safety net systems during times of crisis,^{lix} particularly due to the historical exclusion of Black folks from these systems. Another barrier to safety net utilization is stigma. For example, when Black workers can access these safety net programs, stereotypes like the “welfare queen” arise, which can discourage Black workers from using them. When communities find ways to support Black workers, it is a beautiful, powerful, and oftentimes life-saving ability, but as alluded to in Figure 15, community organizations can only do so much to fill gaps in existing government programming. California in particular can bridge this gap arising from egregiously disproportionate unemployment and income inequality, by supporting progressive taxation and universal basic income programs, like the BIG:LEAP Program.

The below quote acknowledges these community assets while critiquing the ability of temporary federal and state emergency aid. This is further evidence that a more robust system is needed to not only support Black workers but also actively combat stereotypes and anti-blackness.

“Ways on how we can help each other. Different people may have different abilities that they don’t know could be useful. Someone should bring us all together and draw out of us what we can do to help each other as opposed to drawing on so many funds and printing so much money that we are going to have to pay back. If we didn’t have it to pay in [the] first place, how are we going to pay it back?”

- A BLACK WOMAN IN HER LATE 50S WHO LIVES IN LOS ANGELES AND WORKS AS A HAIRSTYLIST.



Food and Housing Impacts

When employment and financial assistance safety nets failed, housing and food insecurity intensified the pandemic’s impacts on Black workers. The workers below share this sentiment in regards to housing challenges due to job loss in the household.

“It’s so many it’s hard to explain. Myself and my daughters, we pay rent together and bills together. One of my daughters lost her job, so that put us behind, and my landlord just [did] not seem to understand.”

- A BLACK WOMAN IN HER MID-50S WHO LIVES IN LOS ANGELES AND WORKS IN HEALTHCARE AND SOCIAL SERVICES.

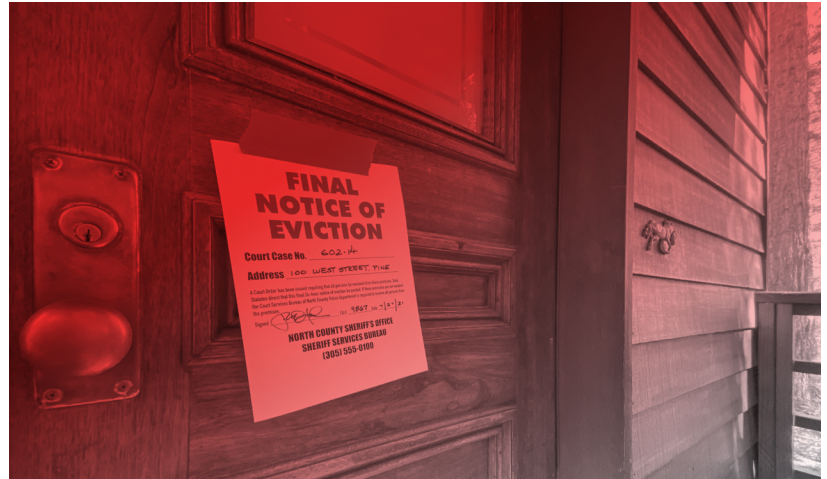


“No significant steady income to consistently pay for rent & utilities. EDD ran out, and I’m waiting on a new claim.”

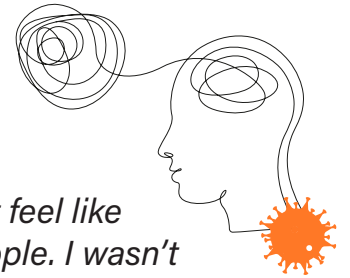
- A BLACK WOMAN IN HER MID 40S WHO LIVES IN LOS ANGELES WHO IS CURRENTLY UNEMPLOYED AND WORKED IN THE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY.

Housing is a human right, yet the longstanding conflict between Black people and property denotes a dream deferred. During the Great Recession of 2007-09, foreclosure was three times higher for Black people than non-Hispanic white people.^{lxi} Most recently, pre-foreclosure notice rates from April to October 2020 are one and a half times greater in Black neighborhoods in Los Angeles County.^{lxii} By August 2020, just under 25% of Black renters were more likely to not pay rent according to the experimental U.S. Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey, the largest percentage of any race.^{lxiii}

When Black workers are not able to secure stable employment with family-sustaining wages, it immediately impacts their ability to cover their primary living expenses like housing and food. A one-time stimulus or temporary pandemic-specific assistance will not hugely impact this housing crisis or rectify the decades of disadvantage and anti-Blackness. Long-term and consistently accessible support is needed in tandem with anti-discrimination and workforce training.

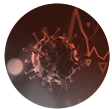


Lack of Care Infrastructure



“We are burned out. I get being an essential worker but I just feel like I’m being worked into an early grave. I wish they’d hire more people. I wasn’t informed when two of my coworkers that I work closely with (read: literally sit next to each other [because] that’s how the office is set up) got [COVID-19]. I had to find out from the sick coworkers when they told me to go get tested. One just came back after six months of being ill...My family member passed away and I had to leave the country for several weeks for the funeral. I came back and immediately got put to work after traveling for several days. My [non-Black] coworker also came back from bereavement and got the mandatory two weeks quarantine that I apparently did not qualify for, despite it being state-mandated!”

- A BLACK WOMAN LIVING IN LOS ANGELES WHO WORKS IN THE FOOD SERVICE AND GROCERY SECTOR.



The United States is experiencing one of the largest care crises of our time. Our survey illuminated the long legacy of Black intergenerational mutual aid that has become more paramount throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Black Worker Rights + Wellness events held by the anchor partners are a testament to this rich tradition of collective care labor. Recent policy and practitioner discussions around the federal Build Back Better Plan have coined the term “care infrastructure” to encompass this system of necessity for all American workers.

“Care infrastructure includes the policies, resources, and services necessary to help U.S. families meet their caregiving needs. Specifically, care infrastructure describes high-quality, accessible, and affordable childcare; paid family and medical leave; and home- and community-based services and support.”^{lxiv}

As discussed in the previous section, the system is not responsive enough to meet basic needs and address systemic anti-Blackness. Yet, research shows that care infrastructure is essential to meet



basic needs and enable economic growth.
^{lxv} Further, inadequate care infrastructure in the workplace and within local, state, and federal emergency support systems compound previously stated impacts of the pandemic, ringing the alarm for a state of emergency for Black workers. For Black women who often juggle childcare and kinship care with employment, as well as other head-of-household demands, consequences are even more dire.
^{lxvi} As previously shared, the majority of workers reported that their workplaces often did not comply with paid leave requirements, and for many workers, that meant they had to choose between caring for themselves or their loved ones.



In the current economy's "shecession," the massive exit of women from the U.S. labor market, Black women suffer the most from COVID-19 job market losses.^{lxvii}^{lxviii} This section centers Black workers, with a focus on Black women and their families, by illuminating the lack and/or breakdown of care infrastructure. Further, Black workers demand mental health support and resources in the workplace and beyond. This report seeks to center this demand amongst a growing body of literature about the necessity for to mental health support.

Lack of Care Infrastructure at Work

Amidst the toil of the COVID-19 pandemic, Black workers elevated concerns around basic safety inside their workplaces. As previously stated, 70% of the respondents working on-site are currently concerned for their personal safety at work which highlights how little their employers care for their well-being. The worker shared similar sentiments.

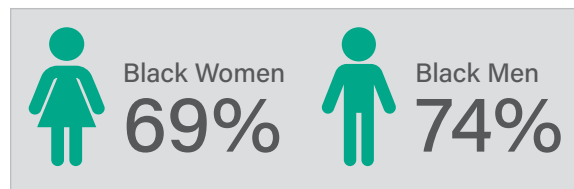


Co workers test positive and we didn't have time to shut down and disinfect. We had to stay at work and risk infection. Many got sick 🙄...We did all the work of disinfecting and cleaning during work hours. No extra pay or incentives."

- A BLACK MAN WHO LIVES IN LOS ANGELES AND WORKS IN THE TRANSPORTATION INDUSTRY.

More Black men (74%) felt concerned for their personal safety than Black women (69%). This may signal slightly more precarity in Black men's employment in the transportation, construction, and retail sectors. Overall Black women's high rate of employment in the healthcare and social service sector shows a similar trend.

Figure 18: Concern for personal safety at work by gender



During the pandemic, Black workers have been left vulnerable, while major companies like Walmart, Amazon, Instacart, and Dollar Tree (and the billionaires who run them) have earned record-breaking profits, which highlights how racist ideologies are often foundational to workplace policies.^{lxix} Additionally, private equity firms such as Blackstone and Cerberus Capital have bought many essential businesses in the healthcare, grocery, and pet care industries that employ Black workers, and these firms reduced costs by making worker-safety cutbacks. This worker's story shows how anti-Blackness shows up at the intersection of worker safety and the COVID-19 pandemic.



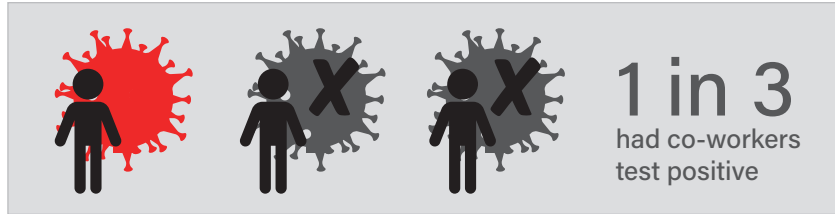
"Initially, workers were sent home from other departments, and we were deemed essential, so we continued to work. When other offices had any cases of exposure, the entire office was sent home. My office, which has the highest minority population, continued to work even when one or two tested positive."

- A BLACK WOMAN IN HER LATE 40S WHO LIVES IN LOS ANGELES AND WORKS IN HEALTHCARE AND SOCIAL SERVICES.



While 29% of those surveyed have had coworkers test positive for COVID-19 (to their knowledge), this worker's experience suggests employers likely have underreported COVID-19 cases to continue production, and as a consequence, deny the care Black workers deserve.

Figure 19: Black workers who had co-workers test positive



As transmission rates rise, this lack of safety and increased exposure has serious consequences that impact both workers' health and their lives. The story of Latasha Williams, a certified nurse assistant working in Riverside, calls attention to the dire consequences of anti-Black policies, as well as the failure of corporations to protect employees from the fatal COVID-19 virus.

“Me, personally, I don't see anything to protect the workers. The only time is when we have State come into the building. Then we have multiple PPE.... We were in the dark in our facility. We did not have the notification notifying employees who have COVID-19...I don't think we had the support to deal with this mentally...I ended up contracting COVID-19 in November [2020]. And I was in quarantine for fourteen days. Almost a month later, I ended up having open-heart surgery. So it has impacted my performance a lot.”

- LATASHA WILLIAMS, A CERTIFIED NURSE ASSISTANT WORKING IN RIVERSIDE, CA.

Latasha's story illustrates how her employer's lack of consistency around COVID-19 precautions had a direct impact on her physical and mental health. Her job's inaction exacerbated the deadliness of the virus, treating Black life as disposable amidst a global emergency. Her story also highlights how Black workers feel like they are not treated with dignity or respect. The issues and sentiments cited suggest these actions happen frequently.

Figure 20. Lack of Dignity and Respect Issues

Verbal/physical/sexual harassment
General lack of respect
Difference in treatment
Lack of care
Racial discrimination
Lack of safety precautions/PPE



“Employers [need] to be a little more understanding of how COVID-19 affects you physically and mentally!”

- A BLACK WOMAN IN HER EARLY 60S WHO LIVES IN LOS ANGELES AND WORKS IN EDUCATION.

“[Employers try to find] a way to show us they care, but we know they don’t care, so we do what we can.”

- A BLACK MAN IN HIS LATE 20S WHO LIVES IN LOS ANGELES AND IS SELF-EMPLOYED.

Black workers demand care, compassion, and consideration of their health and wellness as a prerequisite to employer policies, resources, and processes.

Lack of Care Infrastructure and Black Women

According to the Department of Labor, Black women nationally suffer the most from COVID-19 job market losses.^{lxxlxxi} In our survey of Southern California, 43% of Black women were laid off, terminated, or furloughed. The “shecession” hit a breaking point at the end of 2020 when disproportionate amounts of BIPOC women were forced to leave the workforce due to increased care responsibilities. 52% of Black women have children under the age of 18 in their homes, and the majority have one to two children. **Approximately 90% have had some increase in at-home responsibilities** including childcare, chores, elderly care, care for a sick family member or roommate, and financial responsibility. Manikki Grey, who works as a preschool teacher, shares a tough trade-off.



“Before the pandemic, I was okay. But after the pandemic, I had to go off of work because I do have a child.”

- MANIKKI GREY, A PARTICIPANT IN THE ANCHOR PARTNERS’ BLACK WORKER RIGHTS + WELLNESS SESSION. SHE WAS A PRESCHOOL TEACHER IN LOS ANGELES.



The consequences were also dire for this worker.

“I had requested for a leave of absence because I just had a baby, but I was denied. I had to resign as it was a difficult time to get a nanny due to the pandemic.”

- A BLACK WOMAN IN HER EARLY 30S WHO IS UNEMPLOYED AND FORMERLY WORKED IN THE HEALTHCARE AND SOCIAL SERVICES SECTOR.



Employers did not provide adequate accommodations to meet Black workers’ needs. As remote work became more necessary, 61% of Black women who worked remotely did not receive the same accommodations from their employers for their at-home offices as they did for in-person work, compared to 38% of Black men.

Figure 21: Little to no remote worker home accommodations by gender



Mental Health, Wellness, and Black Workers

Black workers expressed a paramount need for mental health and wellness that predates the COVID-19 pandemic. As one worker said, ***“Being Black in LA is stressful without the pandemic... I need services regardless.”***

On a scale of one to five, 80% of respondents rated their stress levels three or higher. Even starker, the need is greater in specific regions. 85% of workers in both the Inland Empire and San Diego rated their stress levels three or higher compared to 83% of workers in Los Angeles. 87% of Black women rated their stress levels three or higher compared to 80% of Black men.

Figure 23: Overall Stress Levels, and Stress Levels by Region and Weekend



Even more alarming, 60% of Black women rated their stress levels as high as four or even five, compared to 52% of Black men. The following worker shares some ways COVID-19 has added more stress to her workplace.

“

“I have had to get a doctor’s note to get the basic protections/ protective equipment...[which] added stress [because I was] trying to protect myself. My workload has been compounded into a shorter period of time, [and it has] strained relationships and [created a] more hostile work environment. I don’t feel emotionally or physically safe or cared for at work. We were offered a total of one mask with the company logo.”

- A BLACK WOMAN IN HER MID-30S WHO LIVES IN LOS ANGELES AND WORKS IN EDUCATION.

The added burden of seeking her own PPE and the lack of care displayed by their employer negatively impacted this worker’s well-being. Shifts in working styles, like moving to remote work, also caused some workers stress.

Further, these workers cited issues of decreased capacity and increased demand, which further increased their stress levels.



“Remote working and much more call volume [is] producing much more stress.”

- A BLACK MAN IN HIS EARLY 30S WHO LIVES IN SAN DIEGO AND WORKS IN THE TRAVEL INSURANCE SECTOR.

“I am a social worker who works with veterans, so we are considered essential workers. In the beginning of the pandemic, we went solely remote which made my work environment stressful.”

- A BLACK WOMAN IN HER LATE 40S WHO LIVES IN LOS ANGELES AND WORKS IN THE HEALTHCARE AND SOCIAL SERVICES SECTOR.



“I had to switch to working from home. Then [I was] working in a hybrid model which was high-risk and a lot more stressful.”

- A BLACK WOMAN IN HER MID-30S WHO LIVES IN SAN BERNARDINO AND WORKS IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR.



“Yes, more demanding. [It is] stressful due to less staff.”

- A BLACK WOMAN IN HER MID-30S WHO LIVES IN LOS ANGELES AND WORKS IN THE HEALTHCARE AND SOCIAL SERVICES SECTOR.

“My job duties increased, [so my] work stress increased.”



- A BLACK WOMAN IN HER MID-40S WHO LIVES IN LOS ANGELES AND WORKS IN THE HEALTHCARE AND SOCIAL SERVICES SECTOR.

Workers also felt especially stressed due to the increased, visible racial violence. This worker shared her story at the intersection of stress and discrimination at work.



“Yes, while working from home due to COVID-19, my boss asked me to take shortcuts which are unethical...I had three white parents decline my counseling...I was given an excessive caseload [in comparison to] my white counterparts. And when I asked about it, I was written up and was given more work to do and had to check in with a staff member... I was overwhelmed and stressed. [I was] homeschooling my two toddlers, and [when] they got sick, I was forced to resign.”

- A BLACK WOMAN IN HER EARLY 50S WHO LIVES IN LOS ANGELES AND FORMERLY WORKED IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR.

The discriminatory treatment from her manager led to increased stress and ultimately the loss of employment due to compounding childcare needs. Studies show a link between socioeconomic status and ethnic disparities in stress and health. Further, “perceived discrimination is a key factor in chronic

To a Brighter Day: Recommendations



“Due to trauma and shock of police killings of Black people, white supremacy, and exclusion in the workplace [employers], should have diversity and inclusion set in place to ensure fair practice and fair treatment of all workers across the board, not just Hispanic workers”

- A BLACK WOMAN IN HER LATE 40S WHO LIVES IN LOS ANGELES WHO WORKS IN SOCIAL SERVICES.



Black workers graciously and bravely shared some of their lowest moments, deepest struggles, and biggest challenges of working and living through a global pandemic. The challenges are clear: an unaddressed Black jobs crisis, discriminatory practices pushing workers out of employment, insufficient systemic support, and a lack of care infrastructure at work.

We asked Black workers to recommend ways that employers and all levels of government could better support them. Their recommendations fell into three categories: 1) long-term economic support and help with basic needs, 2) targeted worker wellness programming, and 3) targeted workforce rights and development programming.



“The government should provide emergency financial relief to all Americans for the duration of the pandemic. The federal and state governments should enforce an eviction moratorium and provide financial assistance to people who have fallen behind on rent or mortgage payments. The federal and state governments should significantly raise the minimum wage so people can afford to live secure lives.”

- A BLACK MAN IN HIS MID-30S WHO LIVES IN LOS ANGELES. HE WORKS IN THE HEALTHCARE AND SOCIAL SERVICES SECTOR.

“Making sure the resources are easily accessible.”

- A BLACK WOMAN IN HER LATE 40S WHO LIVES IN LOS ANGELES. SHE IS CURRENTLY EMPLOYED IN THE GIG ECONOMY.

“Mental health days that would allow workers a day off to destress, relax, rest, and reset.”

- A BLACK WOMAN IN HER EARLY 30S WHO LIVES IN LOS ANGELES. SHE WORKS IN THE HEALTHCARE AND SOCIAL SERVICES SECTOR.

“More paid time off to mitigate stress.”

- A BLACK WOMAN IN HER LATE 40S WHO LIVES IN LOS ANGELES. SHE WORKS IN THE HEALTHCARE AND SOCIAL SERVICES SECTOR.



"For [employers] to be a little more understanding of how COVID-19 affects you physically and mentally!"

- A BLACK WOMAN IN HER EARLY 60S WHO LIVES IN LOS ANGELES. SHE WORKS IN EDUCATION.

"Job readiness, workers' rights, discrimination training, and when to report."

- A BLACK WOMAN IN HER LATE 40S WHO LIVES IN SAN DIEGO. SHE WORKS IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR.

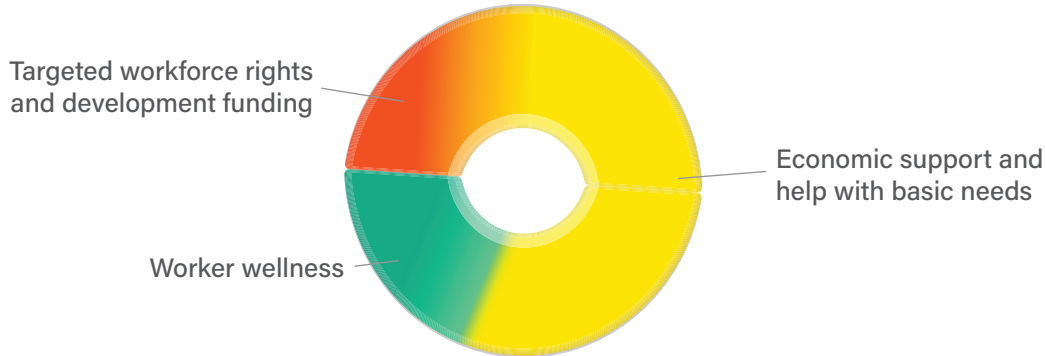
"Strengthen testing, isolate those who are infected, and pay attention to the survival of our black people."

- A BLACK MAN IN HIS EARLY 30S WHO LIVES IN LOS ANGELES. HE WORKS IN THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR.

"Better job training and education opportunities for Black people."

- A BLACK MAN IN HIS MID-30S WHO IS UNEMPLOYED AND FORMERLY WORKED IN EDUCATION.

BLACK WORKER DEMANDS FOR RECOVERY



These recommendations from nearly two thousand Black workers were taken into context of different regional, state, and national landscapes. The following recommendations are proposed to realize a California where advancing justice creates equitable and fair working conditions that sustain Black families and vibrant communities.

Long-Term Economic Support and COVID-19 Recovery Programming

Regional:

- **Support Black workers to navigate the myriad of systems that create the California social safety net.** Our findings suggest that funding community-based organizations (CBOs) to serve as system navigators for Black workers would help. While some workers were able to turn to worker centers or other CBOs, there remains a gap in awareness and accessibility of what support is available to them. CBOs embedded in the community are well-positioned to fill this gap, as they can build trust and relationships with workers. However, this is a time- and people-intensive process. Regional funding resources would help to source local CBOs for this function.

State:

- **Fund grassroots Black community-based and worker organizations for long-term COVID-19 recovery programming.** This includes setting aside funds to make PPE and COVID-19 testing directly available to workers, as well as funding for continued worker education on various COVID-19-related worker rights, protections, and resources. Our findings show that Black workers are already behind in recovery, and without intentional and targeted COVID-19 support, recovery for Black workers will take over a decade.



- **Lower administrative barriers to encourage greater Black community-based and worker organization engagement in state funding sources.** The administrative burden of government grant funding often prohibits meaningful participation of community groups, particularly in leadership roles. Black community-based and worker organizations have the relationships necessary to ensure COVID-19 relief and recovery funding reach Black workers and communities. Due to the historic under-funding of Black-led organizations, some do not have the administrative capacity to participate in state-funded COVID-19 relief programming.^{lxxvi} By lowering the administrative barriers, removing the reimbursement model, creating uncomplicated documentation, with other improvements, more Black-led organizations would be able to participate.
- **Strengthen social safety net programmatic capacity to be responsive to Black workers' immediate needs.** This includes but is not limited to increasing the administrative capacity of CalFresh, Medi-CAL, and LWDA to address the long-term impact of economic injustice. This will help those programs be more responsive to Black workers' immediate needs.

Federal:

- **Pass federal legislation and target support for Black workers. This legislation should include job access, childcare funding, paid family leave, and home care.** Black workers shared an overwhelming urgency for wellness support due to the increased demands and stress caused by the pandemic, which has exacerbated the ongoing Black jobs crisis. This recommendation is a vital and actionable piece of care infrastructure that will improve worker wellness.
- **Update of Executive Order (E.O.) 11246.** Black workers are expressly demanding improved access to good jobs.^{lxxvii} An update of E.O. 11246 will create a federal standard for the inclusion of Black workers, as well as workers of color and women, in federally-funded projects that provide good jobs. Federally-funded projects are typically situated in sectors and industries like construction, building trades, green energy, and more. These sectors have historically provided workers with substantial and high-road employment that helps

them provide for themselves and their families. Unfortunately, in these same industries, Black workers have been historically and systematically excluded. Strengthening E.O. 11246 will ensure that Black workers are represented in these industries and thus provide access to skilled Black workers by disaggregating minority utilization goals by race for federally-contracted projects.

- **Continue to disperse COVID-19 relief funds as the pandemic continues.** This will address Black workers' overrepresentation in unemployment throughout the pandemic. Financial assistance remains a leading request of Black workers. The federal government must administer stimulus relief for the remainder of the pandemic, while states maintain robust and equitable unemployment insurance departments.
- **Raise minimum wage standards.** Even workers who remained employed reported low personal income in 2020 and were concentrated in low-wage essential jobs. Raising the wage floor, especially in essential industries with high concentrations of Black workers, is a long-term solution that would raise income levels for Black workers.

Support Black Worker Wellness

Regional

- **Expand local human and civil rights offices across the Southern California region.** Our findings show that Black workers continue to face discrimination at work and need support to navigate the worker protections system. An expansion of local human and civil rights offices in the Southern California region will give workers a local resource as they hold their employers accountable for discrimination.



State

- **Address racism as a workplace hazard.** Define racism as a workplace health and safety issue within the California Division of Occupational Safety and Health (Cal/OSHA). As many counties in California begin to declare racism as a public health crisis, labor agencies should also declare racism as a workplace health and safety issue. Cal/OSHA's role is to protect workers' health and safety from toxins that kill, and discrimination has had deadly impacts for Black workers. Cal/OSHA already provides health and safety training and protocols that protect vulnerable workers. Findings suggest that racism and discrimination experienced on the job impacts Black workers' mental health. Thus, Cal/OSHA should implement anti-racist policies and practices that specifically target and address anti-blackness by employers.
- **California Labor Workforce Development Agency establishes equity target populations and designates Black workers as a targeted population in their programming.** The failure to identify Black workers as a target population in service delivery has resulted in

fewer investments and strategic initiatives dedicated to resolving the Black jobs crisis. This includes a need for strategic enforcement in low-wage and gig sectors that employ Black workers, as well as broader data collection and analysis by the agency on the Black jobs crisis. Black workers in California have seen little gains over the last 30 years and have experienced disproportionate levels of homelessness, incarceration, displacement, and disease. LWDA should also fund Black-led organizations that lead training on racism and anti-Blackness designed for employers and labor agencies. In conjunction, businesses that receive public funding must be required to provide anti-racism training to their employees. As well as, fund Black-led organizations to provide trauma-informed worker wellness workshops for Black workers. Black workers have explicitly asked for support in navigating racism in the workplace and for avenues to protect their mental health and wellness. Targeted support to address this need can include trauma-informed healing methods for Black workers, as well as education that addresses navigating racism in the workplace and filing a claim with DFEH.



- **The Department of Fair Employment and Housing (DFEH) invests in workshare agreements with the local civil rights offices.** These agreements would allow DFEH and the local offices to investigate and adjudicate cases of discrimination, expanding boots-on-the-ground efforts. As noted in the report, awareness is only one piece of the puzzle, and better equipping DFEH to enforce anti-discrimination laws will better help Black workers seek justice for acts of discrimination. DFEH should also institute a strategic enforcement office (similar to the Labor Commissioner’s Bureau of Field Enforcement (BOFE)) within DFEH to investigate and enforce racial discrimination violations.
- **California Department of Health Care Services must increase the availability and accessibility of mental health and wellness services for Black workers.** Black workers shared their need for increased access to mental health professionals. Our findings also show that the stress levels of Black workers are extremely high, and mental health professionals can aid Black workers in managing stress and crises.^{lxxviii}

Federal

- **Pass legislation that shortens the workweek and requires employers to provide mental health days to workers.** Black workers shared they are often putting their wellness on hold to not miss work. Giving Black workers a shortened workweek and mental health days has been shown in pilot studies to support overall worker wellness.

Direct Workforce Rights Training and Development Funding to Black Workers

Regional

- **Set aside regional workforce development funds to pilot public employment benefit programs and build quality job pathways.**

There is a long tradition in the Black community of public sector jobs providing quality work with family-sustaining wages.^{lxxx}

There must be expanded access to quality careers in the public sector, including a support system to ensure Black workers are successful in these jobs. These programs can also contribute to anti-displacement measures throughout the region.



State

- **Fund Black Worker Centers to develop and implement robust mechanisms for 'Know Your Rights' training and resources,** similar to the COVID-19 Workplace Outreach Project. The majority of the Black workers surveyed were not aware of long-standing worker rights and protections. Black Worker Centers are well-positioned to create culturally relevant training and share 'Know Your Rights' and other worker protection resources.

Federal

- **Fund workforce development and training for Black workers** by investing in apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs at the state and community level. These types of programs and other workforce development strategies, like the High Road Training Partnerships, introduce more equitable systems for Black workers by providing direct entry pathways into apprenticeship positions on projects. Similar to E.O. 11246, apprenticeship programs and other workforce development programs should mirror the racial and ethnic demographic of the communities they serve. These programs would benefit from minority goals set by race and ethnicity.

This current economic restructuring can create meaningful working conditions and realities for Black workers and communities. This is an opportunity to avoid the mistakes that were made after the Great Recession that failed to support Black workers. This is a moment to center Black workers, their rights, their protections, and their needs as we chart a path forward.

Appendix

Methodology

The Essential Stories surveyed targeted convenience sampling of Black workers living in the four target counties. 1,792 Black workers completed the full survey. While anyone who identifies as a Black worker was able to take the survey, the outreach done by the Southern California Black Worker Hub for Regional Organizing (SoCal BW Hub) and their partners targeted low-wage workers, essential workers, and workers likely economically impacted by COVID-19. The survey link and information were included in outreach materials by the SoCal BW Hub and their partners to over 40,000 Black workers in Southern California. All questions were in English. Survey questions were multiple choice and open-ended to provide space for workers to explain their answers on certain multiple-choice questions.

A team of CARE at Work researchers reviewed each survey and checked for errors or discrepancies, as well as the second round of data-cleaning once all the surveys were collected. The research team ran basic descriptive statistics like frequencies and crosstabs, and completed manual coding of the open-ended questions. We developed data factsheets and presented the data to anchor partners through data analysis workshops. We conducted an extensive literature review and analyzed census data. We also worked with our larger CARE at Work team and advisory members to review findings and the report draft.

The majority of our participants live and/or work in Los Angeles County, followed closely by the Inland Empire counties, San Bernardino, and Riverside, with the smallest proportion of participants from San Diego county. The proportions of respondents match the relative proportions of the Black populations in these counties.

Figure 25: Location of Essential Stories survey participants

	ES SURVEY RESPONDENTS	RELATIVE PROPORTION OF BLACK RESIDENTS^{lxxxix}
Los Angeles	66.20%	62%
San Bernardino	12.30%	14%
Riverside	9.30%	12%
San Diego	12.20%	13%
Total	100%	100%

Approximately 50% of the participants had children living at home with them, and on average, most participants had two children under the age of 18 living in their home.

Figure 26: Number of children under the age of 18 living with the survey participant

NUMBER OF CHILDREN REPORTED	%
0	49%
1	22%
2	17%
3+	12%

This data is representative of the experiences of the Black workers who completed the survey and is on trend with what other research is reporting about Black workers during COVID-19. Though this is not a representative sample, it is robust and captures the experience of Black workers in Southern California, particularly those in low-wage jobs.

Glossary

Anti-Blackness is a spectrum ranging from seemingly small offenses that degrade a person’s morale to more overt incidents such as the violent death of Breonna Taylor. All of it qualifies as anti-Blackness.

“We choose not to frame anti-Blackness as an effect of capitalist relations. Rather, we insist that anti-Blackness remains a necessary precondition for the perpetuation of capitalism, as the perpetual expansion of capitalist practices requires ‘empty’ spaces open for appropriation—a condition made possible through the modern assumption of Black a-spatiality.”

“These scholars argue that civil society as we understand and live it is (in)formed by the dehumanizing condition of chattel slavery. They claim that civil society, therefore, is inherently antithetical to all manifestations of Black social life, yet requires Blackness for its political, economic, ontological, epistemological, and—as we aim to show—spatial coherence.”^{lxxxii}

Laid-off vs. Terminated: When one is laid off, it means one has lost their job due to no fault of their own, and instead is let go due to company changes and decisions. The difference between being laid off and being terminated is that if you are terminated, the company considers that your actions have caused the termination.

Furloughed: Being furloughed means you are still employed by the company you work for, but you cannot work or receive pay.^{lxxxiii}

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Essential Stories:

Black Worker COVID-19 Economic Health
Impact Survey

UCLA Center for the Advancement
of Racial Equity at Work

UCLA Labor Center

