



**COMMUNITY
INVESTMENT
FOR FAMILIES
DEPARTMENT**
Paths to Prosperity



KAREN BASS, MAYOR
ABIGAIL R. MARQUEZ, GENERAL MANAGER

March 11, 2025

Council File: 25-0006-S44
Council District: Various
Contact Person and Phone Number:
Aaron Strauss: (213) 574-6354

Honorable Karen Bass
Mayor, City of Los Angeles
Room 303, City Hall
200 N. Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012
Attn: Thomas Arechiga
Legislative Coordinator

Honorable Members of the City Council
C/O City Clerk
Room 395, City Hall
200 N. Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012
Attn: Luigi Verano
Legislative Coordinator

REPORT BACK REGARDING PROGRAM DESIGN FOR A GUARANTEED INCOME PROGRAM OR EMERGENCY CASH ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR ANGELENOS ECONOMICALLY IMPACTED BY THE 2025 WILDFIRES

SUMMARY

The General Manager of the Los Angeles Community Investment for Families Department (CIFD) respectfully requests that your office review this transmittal and forward it to the appropriate committees for further consideration. Through this transmittal, CIFD underscores the critical role that unconditional cash assistance programs can play in supporting vulnerable populations, particularly those impacted by the devastating wildfires that recently affected Los Angeles. This report provides the City Council and the Mayor with options for funding, program design, and implementation.

INTRODUCTION

On January 7, 2025, several destructive wildfires erupted across the greater Los Angeles area, resulting in loss of life, widespread destruction of homes and structures, and significant economic hardship. Thousands of Angelenos, many of whom were already vulnerable, suffered job losses and financial strain due to the fires. In response, Councilmembers Eunisses Hernandez and Curren Price authored a motion (C.F. 25-0006-S44), seconded by Councilmember Nithya Raman, instructing CIFD to report back with recommendations and program parameters for a Guaranteed Income and/or Emergency Cash Assistance program for workers affected by the disaster. This includes individuals impacted by job loss, reduced hours, wage theft, and other economic hardships, such as outdoor, domestic, and childcare workers.

This report outlines the context surrounding these challenges. It provides recommendations for designing, implementing, and administering guaranteed income and/or direct cash assistance programs to support the affected populations.

As we developed this report, CIFD met with various community organizations, such as Alliance for a Better Community through its Fuerza Fund, CHIRLA, and Inclusive Action for the City, and our government partners at the County Department of Economic Opportunity, Department of Business and Consumer Affairs, and others, to better understand the programs currently underway. These programs provide financial relief to displaced workers and, more recently, displaced tenants and homeowners. Except for the Impacted Worker Relief Fund, funded by the County of Los Angeles, the other programs are managed by community-based organizations with limited funding and lack the staffing infrastructure to reach a more significant number of impacted individuals.

With as many as 35,000 jobs potentially lost, both temporarily and permanently, due to the fires and their subsequent downstream effects that ripple through various sectors, the need for additional support is urgent. Though it is unlikely that this program will reach all low-income Angelenos impacted by the fires, this report outlines calculations and potential options to highlight the challenge's scale and offer a path forward.

DIRECT CASH ASSISTANCE AS A RESPONSE TO NATURAL DISASTERS

Several cities in the United States have implemented direct cash assistance or guaranteed income programs in response to natural disasters, including the City of Los Angeles, which led one of the largest guaranteed income programs in response to economic devastation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. CIFD's recommendation for a direct cash assistance program is informed by the success of similar models across the country, including our own program. A few examples include:

- **Los Angeles, California** – The City and County of Los Angeles introduced Guaranteed Income Pilot Programs in 2022, specifically for residents impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The City's program reached 3,200 residents and offered \$1,000 a month for a period of 12 months to selected individuals. The County of Los Angeles offered a similar program but to 1,000 individuals for a period of 24 months. The City of Los Angeles released the findings from the research study in 2024, which demonstrated that financial assistance reduced food insecurity, improved mental health and employment outcomes, and fostered economic stability in the face of crises.
- **Tulsa, Oklahoma** – Tulsa introduced a Guaranteed Income Pilot Program in 2020, specifically for residents impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which worsened existing economic disparities. The program provided \$400 per month to selected low-income households. Although the focus was not solely on natural disasters, the program aimed to help communities already vulnerable to economic shocks, including those in areas that had been affected by recent flooding and storms.
- **Marin County, California** – In response to the 2017 North Bay wildfires, Marin County launched a pilot program providing direct cash assistance to residents who had been displaced or lost homes. The program was part of a broader recovery effort that included housing assistance and other forms of financial support.
- **Chicago, Illinois** – Chicago launched its Resilient Communities Pilot Program in 2022, providing \$500 per month to 5,000 residents who experienced financial hardship due to the pandemic but also exacerbated by other community challenges, including flooding and storms. Although a single natural disaster did not initiate the program, it was designed to address economic vulnerability, including those at risk of losing homes due to natural events. This pilot builds on the understanding that direct cash assistance can provide a flexible safety net for those impacted by disasters and be a key recovery tool.
- **New Orleans, Louisiana** – In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans saw multiple community-led initiatives that provided direct cash assistance to displaced residents. Various grassroots organizations and city-led initiatives set up funds to help families return and rebuild after losing everything. Programs included immediate relief funds, emergency grants, and cash disbursements to assist with relocation costs, home repairs, and other recovery needs.

These examples show how direct cash assistance and guaranteed income programs have been used, or could be used, in the context of natural disasters. They emphasize the importance of providing immediate, flexible support to residents facing economic hardship due to unforeseen events. They can ensure that the most vulnerable residents—especially low-income individuals, communities of color, and mixed-status families—receive the necessary resources to rebuild their lives after the trauma caused by the recent wildfires.

PROPOSED WILDFIRE EMERGENCY “WE FUND” RECOVERY PROGRAM

CIFD proposes the program name “WE FUND” - Wildfire Emergency Fund. This acronym emphasizes the pilot's emergency relief objective: to provide unconditional cash support to impacted residents. The program aims to offer either one-time emergency assistance or short-term, recurring cash assistance to households affected by the recent wildfires. This initiative underscores solidarity between the City of Los Angeles government and affected communities while empowering recipients with the financial freedom to address their immediate needs.

The recent wildfires in Los Angeles County have caused devastating losses not only for homeowners but also for low-income workers, many of whom have lost their jobs and income. Impacted workers include housekeepers, gardeners, landscapers, and other service roles, and are among the most vulnerable to economic disruption during disasters like wildfires.

The challenges for impacted workers and their families are dire as they face mounting bills and an uncertain future. Stories of affected households continue to unfold throughout the county, particularly in communities like Pacific Palisades, Altadena, and Malibu, where service workers make up a significant portion of the workforce but lack job security or financial safety nets.

Research from the UCLA Latino Policy and Politics Institute has shown that approximately 35,000 Latino workers may permanently lose their jobs because of the fires, and many of these workers are unable to access unemployment benefits due to their immigration status. Although Latinos are just 23% of the population across the three major evacuation zones, they make up 36% of all workers in those areas. Furthermore, a 2018 study led by the University of Washington indicates that communities predominantly composed of Black, Hispanic, or Native American populations experience 50% greater vulnerability to wildfires, whether directly or indirectly, compared to primarily white communities in the U.S. The study provides valuable insights into the broader impacts of wildfires on communities of color. Additionally, many impacted workers are excluded from traditional disaster aid programs, leaving them and their families vulnerable to greater financial insecurity. While emergency federal and state grants have been allocated to create temporary jobs and training for displaced workers, the need for direct financial assistance remains urgent.

CIFD is proposing two program options for consideration: a one-time direct cash assistance program and a six-month guaranteed income program. By implementing these programs, we can provide a critical financial lifeline to those affected by the wildfires, ensuring that they have the initial resources necessary to rebuild their lives and recover from the trauma of this disaster.

FUNDING AND PROGRAM DESIGN OPTIONS

CIFD can successfully design and administer a program of any size. The table below offers various options for potential monthly amounts, duration, and participant reach pilot programs with varying underlying budgets.

Amount	Duration	# Participants	Disbursement \$
\$2,000	One Time	1,000	\$2M
\$2,000	One Time	3,000	\$6M
\$1,000	12 Months	500	\$6M
\$1,000	12 months	1,000	\$12M
\$500	6 Months	2,000	\$6M
\$500	6 Months	4,000	\$12M

Population Served and Eligibility Criteria

Per guidance from the City Council, this pilot program will serve workers impacted by the wildfires, including landscapers, gardeners, housekeepers, childcare workers, and others. CIFD plans to work closely with a number of reputable and experienced service providers who will raise awareness of the program among their clients and assist with their applications. However, applicants will not be required to work through these organizations to apply for the program. CIFD recommends the following eligibility criteria:

1. Applicants must have experienced a direct work impact by the wildfires, such as full loss of employment, loss of specific clients, or reduced hours. This includes workers in industries, such as landscapers, gardeners, housekeepers, day laborers, food vendors, childcare providers, and more.
2. Be a resident of the City of Los Angeles
3. Be 18 years of age or older

Additional Resources

To maximize the impact of this additional income, CIFD plans to offer a suite of paired resources to program participants, leveraging existing community-based services. By working with FamilySource Centers and pre-identified service providers, CIFD aims to create a supportive ecosystem available to participants that enhances their financial stability and chances at long-term success. The program will also leverage the Impacted Worker and Family Recovery Centers, which brings together the City’s FamilySource, WorkSource, and BusinessSource Systems, to offer additional direct services and referrals to housing navigation services, financial coaching, safe and affordable banking products, job training and placement, small business services, and immigration services. These resources are designed to provide program participants with the tools they need to regain economic stability and successfully return to the workforce. Furthermore, to minimize the impact of this additional income on participants’ existing benefits, CIFD plans to secure available exemptions from the California Department of Social Services for both CalFresh and CalWORKs using their existing process. CIFD will also continue to advocate for waiver processes for federally administered benefits, including those provided by the Social Security Administration or the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Additionally, to ensure that all program participants understand the potential impacts on their benefits, CIFD will establish partnerships with local legal aid organizations.

FORWARD TECHNOLOGY PLATFORM

To effectively disperse the resources to program participants, CIFD is engaging with [Forward](#), a technology platform that partners with governments to make disbursement programs more accessible, efficient, and effective. CIFD and Forward are discussing building a unified platform, including several CIFD-administered cash assistance programs, including this and future potential Guaranteed Income programs and other income support programs. The Forward platform will serve as a centralized hub, streamlining the applications, participant selection and enrollment, and funds disbursement as summarized below.

Participant Applications

The Forward platform will enable a simple and accessible application process for program participants, consisting of the following primary components:

1. Online application: CIFD will work with Forward to design an online portal for submitting applications. CIFD's FamilySource Centers and other community partners will be enlisted to help individuals submit the online application.
2. Randomized Selection: Participants will be selected randomly. They will be contacted once selected and assigned to a local FamilySource Center to complete the application process.
3. Self-certification: Applicants will be asked to bring documentation to verify city residence and wildfire impact. However, applicants can also self-certify that they meet the eligibility criteria.
4. Basic contact information: Applicants will be asked to provide contact information, including but not limited to names, addresses, and communication preferences.
5. Demographic information: This will include details such as race, ethnicity, gender, and income.

Participant Selection

Once applications are submitted, the Forward platform and CIFD will collaborate to conduct a preliminary review for eligibility. Program participants will then be randomly selected based on the specific program population, subject to final budgetary decisions and available program slots.

Participant Enrollment

After participants are selected to join the program, the Forward platform will guide them through enrollment. This will include:

1. Verification of eligibility: The platform will help collect documentation that verifies each selected participant meets the eligibility criteria, such as provider letters, personal documentation, income information, and more.
2. Program guidelines: Participants will review program guidelines, complete consent forms, and receive referrals to services summarized in the above Additional Resources section.

Disbursement Mechanism

Once enrolled, program participants will be able to select their preferred disbursement mechanism for their funds:

1. Banked participants: Program participants who are already banked will receive direct ACH transfers to their accounts.
2. Unbanked participants: Program participants who are not already banked will be referred to L.A. County's [Bank On](#) financial institution partners, who all offer safe, affordable, and accessible

banking products.

3. Immediate Response Card: Program participants who prefer or cannot use the above options will receive an Angeleno Immediate Response Card (IRC) via MoCaFi. Funds are automatically loaded onto participant cards at a predetermined time each month. The IRC functions as a debit card, allowing cardholders to make swipes or withdraw cash from a range of fee-free ATMs.

Cost

CIFD will leverage existing GBI administration funding to contract with Forward. These funds were allocated to the Mayor's Fund for Los Angeles. The contract with Forward will be executed by the Mayor's Fund for this program. Forward has quoted a base price of \$215,000 to administer this program. Additionally, Forward will charge a payment enablement fee of 2% for all funds transferred via ACH. There is no payment enablement fee for funds disbursed through the MoCaFi IRC card. All charges will be covered by the existing GBI administration funds.

Customer Service

CIFD will work with Forward to support a comprehensive customer service system and ensure program participants can access assistance throughout the processes. This will include:

- Program email inbox: Monitoring and responding to participant inquiries.
- Program phone hotline: Providing phone support for inquiries and troubleshooting.
- Simple texting: This service will allow mass communication and individual follow-up via text message.
- Call center: The call center will assist with selection notification, scheduling enrollment appointments, and frequently asked questions.
- Participant Handbook: All participants will receive a clear and accessible guide detailing FAQs and relevant contact information.

Furthermore, the CIFD team is committed to ensuring all participants have equal access to the program, regardless of language barriers. Therefore, all program materials and communication will be available in threshold languages and:

- All selection notification emails will be translated into the applicant's preferred language as indicated during the application process.
- Live interpretation will be available for all applicants upon request.
- All program materials will be translated upon request, ensuring all participants have the information they need to fully engage with the program participants.

The urgency of this crisis, both due to the wildfires and our city's homelessness crisis, calls for a continued bold and responsive approach to meet immediate needs. Direct cash assistance has proven to be an effective strategy in addressing emergencies and natural disasters, offering recipients the flexibility to cover immediate expenses without the delays and complexity of other forms of aid.

FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

CIFD is working closely with the Mayor's Office and the Mayor's Fund for Los Angeles to identify philanthropic resources to support the recommendations outlined in this report. CIFD has also engaged the CAO's office to explore other potential City resources. If alternative funding sources are not identified, the approval of these recommendations will require funding from the general fund, with costs ranging from \$2.2 million to \$12 million, depending on the selected program option. However, this

investment will provide significant long-term benefits, helping to sustain families affected by the wildfires, reduce displacement, and ensure financial stability.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Abigail R. Marquez', with a stylized flourish at the end.

ABIGAIL R. MARQUEZ
General Manager