EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

COVID-19 is disproportionately impacting frontline essential workers of color in California. The health and economic security of Latino, Black, and Asian Californians are at higher levels of risk, given their high representation in essential work settings during the pandemic. These jobs tend to be low-paid, and workers frequently lack health insurance.

This brief describes the occupational, racial, and geographic variations of California voters who can and cannot work from home. Furthermore, we compare financial susceptibility and occupational safety by Californians’ essential worker status. Findings reflect that communities of color and those residing in rural counties are less likely to be able to work from home. Furthermore, those working in personal care services, healthcare services, and other blue-collar occupations (manufacturing, hotels and hospitality, transportation and utilities, and essential retail) are more likely to leave home to go to work and consider it a very serious problem to their safety.

The brief also suggests the steps that the California State Legislature, local governments, and county agencies can take to ensure that all frontline, essential workers are protected. This includes increasing COVID-19 testing access and culturally competent health awareness campaigns, expanding and enforcing safety standards, and providing hazard pay and quality child care.

INTRODUCTION

On March 19, 2020, California Governor Gavin Newsom signed Executive Order N-33-20, ordering a shelter-in-place, while simultaneously calling Californians working in thirteen critical sectors to continue their work during the COVID-19 pandemic [1]. It is estimated that roughly one-third to one-half of California’s labor force is employed in these critical occupations [2]. Essential workers are not only tasked with supporting the state’s health and basic economic needs but are often asked to do it without the necessary resources and supplies to do their job safely. A statewide survey by the Institute of Governmental Studies (IGS), in conjunction with the California Initiative for Health Equity & Action (Cal-IHEA), finds that COVID-19 has revealed the economic and health inequities afflicting workers of color [3].

This policy brief draws on the original analyses of the data to examine racial, financial, geographic, and safety differences by occupation and workplace environment (i.e., working from home and working outside of the home and in contact with others). The objective of this analysis is to disentangle the social and economic risk factors that place communities of color at a greater risk of financial and health vulnerability due to COVID-19 because of their status as an essential frontline worker.
Contextualizing the Problem: COVID-19’s Impact on Essential Workers

As the number of COVID-19 cases continues to rise in the United States (U.S.), essential workers of color are facing the brunt of the health and economic burden related to the pandemic. This disproportionate impact of the pandemic on communities of color is reflected in state data as Latinos account for 39% of California’s population but comprise 56% of confirmed COVID-19 cases. In contrast, Whites account for 37% of California’s population but only include 18% of confirmed cases [4]. Furthermore, among individuals aged 65 and over, Blacks were almost four times as likely as Whites to be hospitalized due to COVID-19 [5]. The disproportionate impact on Black and Latino communities is evident nationally, as 38% of COVID-19 patients are Latino, and 29% are Black; yet they only make up about 18% and 13% of the population of the U.S. population, respectively [5]. In addition to disparate infection rates, people of color are also dying of COVID-19 at a greater rate in California than their White counterparts. Latinos in California makeup about 46% of coronavirus deaths and are dying at a rate of 2.5 times higher than their proportion of the state’s population [6][7].

For communities of color, negative health outcomes are only one part of the problem. As COVID-19 continues to spread around the country, economic strife related to the pandemic is a growing concern for communities of color. Workers of color are more likely to be employed in an industry at risk for job loss. As of late March, 49% of Latinos nationally say they or someone in their household has experienced a job loss or a reduction in hours due to the pandemic [8][9]. In contrast, 33% of U.S. adults nationally say they or someone in their household has experienced a job loss or a reduction in hours related to the pandemic. Apart from being employed in industries with a high susceptibility of job loss, among Latinos who continue to be employed, about 52% of low wage workers are essential workers [8]. Even before the pandemic, jobs in high-risk industries, including farming, food production, retail, and personal care services (i.e., child care, in-residence elderly care), tend to be low-paid and do not afford access to health benefits and paid sick time.

The lack of protections is now exacerbating COVID-19 infection rates as workers are forced to balance their economic and physical well-being while serving the public [10]. In the Bay Area alone, 66% of essential frontline workers are people of color, and 43% are immigrants [11]. As the pandemic continues to grow, and emerging evidence continues to illustrate health and economic inequalities communities of color are facing, state and local officials must take action to ensure essential workers are adequately protected as they continue to serve the state.

FINDINGS

Table 1 includes column-specific demographic, financial, and health comparisons between respondents who can work from home and those who are essential workers. It is important to note that there is no standard definition that qualifies an individual as an essential worker. In California, Executive Order N-62-20, which defines eligibility for workers’ compensation benefits, states that workers whose employers require that they leave their home to go to work are “essential” regardless of industry [12]. To differentiate between essential worker status, we asked: “Which best describes your workplace since the California statewide shelter-in-place went into effect?” We classify essential workers as those respondents who stated that they leave home to go to work and have either minimal or regular contact with other people. Individuals who can work from home are considered non-essential workers.

As seen in Table 1, among essential workers, healthcare services, restaurants and bars, and retail are the top three industries of employment in the state at 18.8%, 12.2%,...
and 11.4%, respectively. Although the categories titled “other White Collar” and “other Blue Collar” make up 14% and 17% of essential workers, respectively, these categories are composed of industries where respondents made up fewer than 4% of the total sample. Specifically, “Other White Collar” workers include those employed in professional and business services (3.2%), education (3.5%), and other (3.9%). On the other hand, “Other Blue Collar” workers include respondents employed in manufacturing (<1%), hotels and hospitality (<1%), transportation and utilities (<1%), rideshare drivers (1.2%), agriculture, forestry, and fishing (2.1%), construction (2.7%) and delivery services for parcel companies, websites, or apps (2.6%). Furthermore, compared to non-essential workers, essential workers are more likely to be employed in the industries of healthcare services (+11.8 percentage points (pp)), retail (+3.1 pp), personal care services (+7.5 pp), janitorial or landscaping (+ 2.4 pp), and Other Blue Collar (+11.3 pp).

Among non-essential workers, the most common industries where they are employed include restaurants and bars (15.5%), self-employed or small business owners (10.5%), and information technology (8.3%). It is important to note that 15% of all survey respondents were employed in restaurants and bars, which explains their more significant share in both essential and non-essential workers.

Furthermore, Latino voters only account for 21.8% of all workers but represent 28.7% and 16.4% of all essential and non-essential workers, respectively. Latino employment in essential work is 75% higher than non-essential work (+12.3 pp). On the other hand, White voters account for 52.8% of all workers but represent 46.0% and 58.5% of essential and of non-essential workers, respectively. White employment in essential work is 21.0% lower than non-essential work (-12.2 pp).

Regional patterns also emerge. Despite making up 15.8% of all employed survey respondents, Central Valley respondents make up 19.1% of essential workers and 13.1% of individuals who can work from home. Similarly, Inland Empire respondents compose 10.6% of our total sample but make up 14.4% of essential workers and 7.5% of those who can work from home.

In terms of occupational safety, 34.6% of essential workers considered the inability to work remotely or working under dangerous conditions (i.e., “working in close proximity to others”) to be a very serious problem, respectively, compared to 8.8% non-essential workers (+ 25.8 pp among essential workers). Also, essential workers’ self-report that they would not get paid if they fall sick with COVID-19 and would have trouble keeping up with basic expenses was 140.2% higher than non-essential workers (+15.7 pp among essential workers).

When it comes to race/ethnicity, Latino and Black Californians are disproportionately represented as essential workers in high-risk industries.

- As noted in Figure 1, Native Americans, Latinos, and Blacks represent the highest proportion of respondents who work outside the home but with minimal contact with people with approximately 48.9%, 27.9%, and 19.6% of respondents, respectively.
- White and Asian respondents have the highest likelihood of being able to work from home, with 61.3% and 58.9% of individuals being able to work from home, respectively. On the other hand, Black and Latinos are less likely to be able to work from home (53.3% and 41.7%, respectively).
- About 30% of Latino and 27.1% of Black individuals reported working outside the home and being in regular contact with people, compared to 19.4% of White respondents.
### Table 1. Employed Respondent Characteristics by Non-Essential and Essential Worker Status (N=4,795), April 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Essential Worker (N=2,130)</th>
<th>Non-Essential (Able to work from home) (N=2,665)</th>
<th>All Workers (N=4,795)</th>
<th>Absolute Percent Difference Between Essential and Non-Essential Workers</th>
<th>Relative Percentage Change Comparing Essential to Non-Essential Workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Percentage Points</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Industry</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare Services</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>168.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail (other than essential retail)*</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>37.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal care services i.e., such as Child care, Elderly Care in Residence</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>1071.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed or small business owner</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>-5.9</td>
<td>-32.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janitorial or Landscaping</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>-14.2</td>
<td>-84.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Technology</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>-8.5</td>
<td>-70.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance and Accounting</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>-4.9</td>
<td>-46.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government service i.e., state, local, or federal</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>-8.8</td>
<td>-58.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other White Collar*</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>77.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Blue Collar **</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>198.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Living with an adult over 65 years</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>77.7</td>
<td>79.7</td>
<td>78.8</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race/ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>-1.8</td>
<td>-12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>75.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>200.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>29.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>58.2</td>
<td>52.8</td>
<td>-12.2</td>
<td>-21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Region</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bay Area</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>-8.1</td>
<td>-31.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Valley</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>45.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inland Empire</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>92.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>-3.5</td>
<td>-12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other North</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other South</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>-21.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Diego/Orange</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>-0.6</td>
<td>-3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unable to work remotely or working under dangerous conditions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Serious Problem</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>293.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat serious</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>190.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not much of a problem</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>-5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Problem at All</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>61.2</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>-32.2</td>
<td>-69.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Sure</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-0.1</td>
<td>-9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Financial &amp; Employment Insecurity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continue to get paid</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>-21.9</td>
<td>-34.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would not get paid &amp; it would be difficult for me to keep up with my basic expenses</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>140.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would not get paid but I would still be able to keep up with my basic expenses</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would lose my job</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>146.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>23.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* “Other White Collar” workers include those employed in professional and business services (3.2%), education (3.5%), and other (3.9%). ** “Other Blue Collar” workers include respondents employed in manufacturing (<1%), hotels and hospitality (<1%), transportation and utilities (<1%), rideshare drivers (1.2%), agriculture, forestry, and fishing (2.1%), construction (2.7%) and delivery services for parcel companies, websites, stores, or apps (2.6%).
In Table 2, we describe the share of essential workers by industry in California. The share of essential workers within each industry ranges from 10.2% in government services to 90.8% in personal care services (i.e., child care, in-residence elderly care).

- Personal care services, healthcare services, and “other Blue Collar” workers (i.e., combination of manufacturing, hotels, and hospitality workers) have the highest proportions of essential workers at 90.8%, 68.2%, and 70.3%, respectively.
- Individuals who are self-employed or small business owners (SBO) are less likely to be essential frontline workers compared to all other categories. This elucidates the organizational control (i.e., control over work schedules and working conditions) that self-employed individuals have and that essential frontline workers lack.

### Table 2: Share of Essential Workers by Industry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Share of Essential Workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government services</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal care services</td>
<td>90.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare services</td>
<td>87.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Other Blue Collar”</td>
<td>70.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals who are self-employed or small business owners (SBO)</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Figure 1: Racial/Ethnic Breakdown of Respondents' Ability to Work from Home or Degree of Contact with Other People if they are Essential Workers (n= 4,795)

- Latino: 30.3% Leave home to go to work and I am in regular contact with other people, 27.9% Leave home to go to work, but my job involves minimal contact with other people, 41.7% Able to work from my home
- Black: 27.1% Leave home to go to work and I am in regular contact with other people, 19.6% Leave home to go to work, but my job involves minimal contact with other people, 53.3% Able to work from my home
- Asian: 22.8% Leave home to go to work and I am in regular contact with other people, 18.3% Leave home to go to work, but my job involves minimal contact with other people, 58.9% Able to work from my home
- Native American: 21.7% Leave home to go to work and I am in regular contact with other people, 48.9% Leave home to go to work, but my job involves minimal contact with other people, 29.3% Able to work from my home
- White: 19.4% Leave home to go to work and I am in regular contact with other people, 19.3% Leave home to go to work, but my job involves minimal contact with other people, 61.3% Able to work from my home
- Other: 25% Leave home to go to work and I am in regular contact with other people, 26.3% Leave home to go to work, but my job involves minimal contact with other people, 48.8% Able to work from my home
- Total: 22.9% Leave home to go to work and I am in regular contact with other people, 21.5% Leave home to go to work, but my job involves minimal contact with other people, 55.6% Able to work from my home
Table 2. Share of Essential Workers by Industry (N= 4,795)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Total Workers</th>
<th>Essential Workers (leaves home to go to work)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government service i.e., state, local, or federal</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed or small business owner</td>
<td>504</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Technology</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance and Accounting</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>30.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restaurants and Bars</td>
<td>742</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail - other than essential category</td>
<td>464</td>
<td>52.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other White Collar</td>
<td>510</td>
<td>58.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janitorial or Landscaping</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>60.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare Services</td>
<td>588</td>
<td>68.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Blue Collar</td>
<td>514</td>
<td>70.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal care services i.e., Childcare, Elderly Care in Residence</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>90.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4795</td>
<td>44.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: In this policy brief, we classify essential workers as those respondents who leave home to go to work and have either minimal or regular contact with other people.

In Figure 2, we restrict our analysis to essential workers and describe the share of essential workers within each industry who consider “being unable to work remotely or working under dangerous conditions (i.e., close proximity to others)” a very serious problem (n= 2,130).

Personal care services, healthcare services, and “other Blue Collar” workers have the highest proportions of essential frontline workers who consider “being unable to work remotely or working under dangerous conditions” a very serious problem, at 39.3%, 40.7%, and 46.2%, respectively (see Figure 2).

Though 58.6% of “Other White Collar” workers (i.e., Business and professional services, education) are frontline essential workers, only 29.4% consider their working conditions to be a very serious problem (see Figure 2).

**Essential workers’ self-report that they would not get paid if they fall sick with COVID-19 and would have trouble keeping up with basic expenses was 140.2% higher than non-essential workers.**
Figure 2. Share of Essential Workers Who Consider “Being Unable to Work Remotely or working under Dangerous Conditions (i.e., close proximity to others)” a Very Serious Problem, Top 10 Industries with Largest Share of Essential Workers (N= 2,130)

Figure 3 describes, by county, the percentage of individuals who indicated they had to leave home to go to work. In the analysis, we combined some sparsely populated counties into groups to create regions with more respondents. This map identifies the 38 areas analyzed.

Geographic Variation:
- CA voters residing in the more rural counties of California (far north and inner regions of the state) are more likely to leave their homes to go to work than those located in coastal counties.
- San Francisco (78%) and Santa Cruz (71%) counties had the highest share of workers who can work from home. In San Francisco County the top three most common jobs are in management, business and financial operations, and sales [13]. Furthermore, the median household income in the county 2018 was $112,376 according to the Census Bureau ACS 1-year estimate [13]. Comparably, in Santa Cruz County the top three most common jobs are in management, office and administrative support, and sales related occupations. The median household income in Santa Cruz was $86,941 in 2018 [14].
- Merced (72%), Butte (67%), and Humboldt (65%) are the top three counties with the highest share of essential workers. In Merced
County, the top three most common jobs held by its residents are farming, fishing, and foresting occupations followed by production and administrative support [15]. The median household income in Merced was $57,745 in 2018 [15].

Figure 3. Proportion of CA Registered Voters who are Essential Frontline Workers (N= 4,795).

**ACTIONS THE STATE HAS UNDERTAKEN TO PROTECT FRONTLINE ESSENTIAL WORKERS**

In late July, California Governor Gavin Newsom acknowledged that COVID-19 is disproportionately impacting communities of color, specifically Asian, Black, and Latinos. A particular risk factor that increases the probability of contracting COVID-19 among communities of color is their employment rates in high-risk sectors such as personal care services (i.e., elderly care, child care), agriculture, and retail [16]. As a result, he announced new protections for essential workers, including isolation and quarantine for specific occupations like farmworkers and the launch of educational campaigns for workers and employers [17].
These new protections include a new isolation program, Housing for the Harvest, which focuses on providing hotel rooms that are safe for Central Valley, Central Coast, and Imperial Valley farmworkers who test positive for COVID-19 or were potentially exposed [18]. These protections further build on California’s public awareness campaign #WearAMask and #StoptheSpread to engage community-based organizations, labor unions, promotoras, and advocacy groups in outreach [17].

Though additional information is pending, questions remain as to whether or not these measures will be sufficient. For one, there is the matter of Housing for the Harvest being able to secure enough spaces in the form of hotels to safely accommodate farmworkers who were exposed or tested positive for COVID-19.

Though Governor Newsom’s order includes additional guidance directing employers to report outbreaks to local health departments, adherence to these guidelines will remain an ongoing issue. For example, some of the foreseen difficulties include ensuring that all employers facilitate temperature screenings at the worksite and provide required personal protective equipment (PPE).

At the individual level, when analyzing the circumstances of low-paid essential workers, the pressure to remain financially afloat may also persuade workers to continue going to work, particularly if they only present with mild symptoms. For undocumented workers, fear of becoming a public charge can dissuade workers from seeking medical care or participating in programs like Housing for the Harvest and using other state-funded resources.

**IMMEDIATE ACTION STEPS TO PROTECT ESSENTIAL WORKERS**

The COVID-19 pandemic is disproportionately impacting essential workers of color by placing their health and economic security at higher levels of risk. In addition to the nascent steps the state has taken to protect these workers, further actions by the state, county, and local leaders can be taken to minimize the health and economic impacts faced by these communities. In the following section, we offer policy and institutional recommendations around six areas that can be enacted to protect essential workers of color and their families. The six recommendations include:

1. Establishing a Health & Racial Equity Task Force in every California county;
2. Improving access to COVID-19 testing via collaboration with community health clinics and worksites;
3. Increasing culturally competent public service announcements regarding workplace rights and COVID-19 testing and treatment;
4. Establishing workplace regulations that all employers are mandated to follow and enforcement mechanisms that ensure their implementation;
5. Instituting a hazard wage pay for all essential workers; and,
6. Creating child care programs and strengthening family leave policies.

**Engaging Community Stakeholders and Cross-Sector Collaboration to Address Inequities**

Every California county should establish a Health & Racial Equity Task Force, similarly to Santa Clara County and the City of San Jose, that includes community members, nonprofit healthcare leaders, labor representatives, and local elected officials to plan how to strategically respond to the needs of communities that are disproportionately impacted by the health, economic, and social consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Over the last few months, Santa Clara County’s Health & Racial Equity Task Force...
has met to understand the experiences of structurally vulnerable communities during the pandemic and address the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on these communities. The Task Force developed a set of policy recommendations and implementation strategies that community members, along with elected officials, nonprofit leaders, and labor unions, consider will promote local health and racial equity [19].

Every county in California should follow this example set by Santa Clara County and tailor strategies that will best support and protect their most vulnerable residents during this pandemic, including essential workers. Incorporating the community’s needs and concerns will ensure that those most impacted by COVID-19 do not face exacerbated health, social, and economic inequities.

**Increase COVID-19 Testing Access**
California’s state, local, and county governing bodies should make priority testing for essential workers who are at highest risk of contracting COVID-19. California needs to ensure that all testing centers are adequately staffed and can meet the community’s testing needs particularly for workers whose jobs entail close contact with others. Local governments should also facilitate off-hours testing sites to increase access to testing for all essential workers. In rural counties, employers, local health departments, and healthcare centers should collaborate to host testing clinics at the workplace.

At the moment, communities of color are more likely to experience longer wait times or be turned away when visiting a testing site [20]. Essential workers, particularly low-income workers, often live in these communities and experience these same shortages and lack of testing.

In response to these issues, the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) staff has recommended that essential workers be granted COVID-19 testing [21]. Likewise, it was suggested that essential workers be tested regularly, with or without symptoms. Currently, essential workers are categorized as a lower-tier priority under California’s four-tier priority testing guidelines [22].

Despite these recommendations from CDPH, California is not in unison with priority testing for essential workers. As of the publication of this brief, California’s state legislature and Governor Newsom have not acted a regulation ensuring timely access to testing for essential workers. Communities of color throughout the state will continue to suffer the most from these testing restrictions.

**Culturally Competent Health Communication**
State and local government agencies should ensure the availability of culturally competent and well-translated health announcements and information on COVID-19 testing and treatment and workplace rights. As COVID-19 guidelines and policies continue to change rapidly, the dissemination of these announcements to non-English speaking communities is crucial towards maintaining public health and safety. According to the Census Bureau, 45% of Californians five years of age and older do not speak English at home, and 19% do not speak English “very well” [23]. Accessible and timely public service announcements in multiple languages can ensure that all essential workers, and their families, know of up to date COVID-19 resources and programs. State and local agencies can also further collaborate with community-based organizations or nonprofits to engage and address the needs of their local communities. Having increased access to testing and equitable language access to critical information can help lessen the impacts faced by essential workers and communities of color during this pandemic.
**Safety Standards to Protect Frontline Essential Workers**

California’s Division of Occupational Safety and Health Administration (Cal/OSHA) has issued standards to protect certain frontline workers from COVID-19 [24]. Cal/OSHA should ensure that employers in the state adhere to these standards; and, they should expand these protections to workers not covered by the current standards, including farmworkers, grocery store workers, restaurant workers, and construction workers [24].

Cal/OSHA should also establish a baseline set of requirements across all industries, rather than disparate guidelines from different institutions, to prevent COVID-19. Additionally, they should increase enforcement of these safety guidelines to ensure that employers, especially those in frontline industries, are taking the necessary steps to create safe work conditions.

Moreover, each local public health department should maintain consistent communication with high-risk worksites. This communication can facilitate the development and enforcement of standards regarding worksite outbreaks, including establishing a targeted response that involves access to a case manager, coordinating free testing, and implementing site-specific controls. For instance, the L.A. County Department of Public Health (LACDPH) has a dedicated case manager to guide worksites on how to respond to an outbreak and also issues infection control guidelines and site-specific control measures [25].

Unlike California, other states have made worksite outbreak information publicly available data on their websites. The Oregon Health Authority (OHA), for example, reports large workplace outbreaks, involving five or more cases in the workplace setting, to the public [26]. Oregon’s public health systems involves a partnership between counties and OHA. California should have a uniform policy demanding that employers inform public health officials of worksite cases. Assemblymember Eloise Gomez Reyes authored AB-685, which would oblige that employers inform their workers of all possible exposures from confirmed cases at the worksite and alert the county health department as soon as there are three cases [27]. Some local public health agencies, such as the LACDPH, already report and track worksite outbreaks [28].

**Additional Compensation for Essential Workers**

Recognizing the additional risk which essential workers are exposing themselves to, federal proposals aim to increase hazard pay and provide paid family and medical leave for essential workers. However, the impasse in the U.S. Senate has kept any federal policy proposals, such as the Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions (HEROES) Act, from passing. Given the federal government’s stalemate on this issue, the California legislature should work to fill in the gaps in federal relief and provide this financial support to worker who are performing essential work, including undocumented workers.

California has implemented the essential worker support fund at the state level, totaling $25 million to financially support essential workers that test positive for COVID-19 or face potential exposure and need to self-isolate [29]. At the local level, counties could use their CARES Act funds to provide essential workers with additional compensation.

Although California’s government has taken certain steps to protect low-income essential workers, more needs to be done to meet their immediate financial needs. In addition to having paid family and medical leave, California’s policymakers should mandate or provide all essential frontline workers with a hazard pay premium.

Providing additional economic relief to Californians during a pandemic will require...
new revenues. A possible manner in which California can increase state revenue is by creating a more equitable tax structure that raises taxes on the wealthy and corporations to the same tax rate as all other workers in the state. Since the start of the pandemic, California’s 166 billionaires have seen their net worth jump by $235 billion [30]. Raising taxes on these entities can help support the state’s essential workers, while simultaneously stimulating the state’s economy. Taking this a step further, AB 2088 by Assemblymember Rob Bonta would establish the nation’s first wealth tax, including a “0.4% tax rate on all net worth above $30 million” [31].

**Quality Child Care for Essential Workers**

Given that many essential workers depend on child care to work, the state legislature needs to strengthen its family leave policies and invest in its child care system. Assemblymember Ash Kalra’s AB 3216 responds to essential workers’ needs by facilitating job-protected leave through the California Family Rights Act (CFRA) and allowing parents of children whose school or child care has closed down to take time off. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, the state can raise these new revenues by raising taxes on wealthy individuals and corporations.

In early April, Governor Newsom signed Executive Order N-47-20, allocating $100 million of COVID-19 pandemic funding to support child care services and providers serving essential workers [32]. Furthermore, $50 million went to the California Department of Education to pay for up to 20,000 limited-term additional child care slots and the other half went to child care facility cleaning and personal PPE procurement. Despite these efforts, California continues to experience an enormous impact on its child care system. COVID-19 has forced hundreds of child care centers to close, while simultaneously seeing an uptick in COVID-19 cases in those that remain open. According to the California Department of Social Services, the total number of positive cases in licensed child care facilities increased by 12.1% in three days in July [33].

**CONCLUSION**

COVID-19 is disproportionately impacting essential workers of color in California. The health and economic security of Latino and Black Californians are at higher risk, given their disproportionate representation in essential work settings during the pandemic. This brief describes the racial composition of essential workers in California, explores the geographic variation in the share of essential workers in each county, reviews the industries where essential workers are employed and the degree of threat of COVID-19 workers experience within each industry.

We also outline actionable steps that the California State Legislature, local governments, and county agencies can take to ensure that all frontline, essential workers are protected. The six areas of focus include 1) establishing a Health & Racial Equity Task Force at the county-level, 2) making testing and treatment more equitable, 3) disseminating culturally competent health and labor rights campaigns, 4) establishing baseline COVID-19 regulations that apply to all industries across the state, 5) instituting a hazard pay for all essential workers, and 6) strengthening California’s family leave policies and child care system. Despite the various opportunities to prevent the exacerbation of social, economic, and health inequities in the state, it is pivotal to include the voices of communities most impacted by the pandemic when creating policy and institutional solutions.

**Data & Methodology**

The findings in this report are based on a Berkeley IGS Poll completed by the Institute of Governmental Studies (IGS) at the
University of California, Berkeley, in conjunction with the California Initiative for Health Equity & Action (Cal-IHEA). The poll was administered online in English and Spanish between April 16 and 20, among 8,785 voters statewide.

We focus our analysis on California registered voters who reported being employed at the time of the survey (n=4,795), thereby excluding students (n=756), retired individuals (n=2,006), and respondents who indicated to have been unemployed (n=1,227) at the time of the survey.

The survey was administered by distributing email invitations to stratified random samples of the state’s registered voters. The overall sample of registered voters with email addresses was stratified to obtain a proper balance of survey respondents across major segments of the registered voter population.

Post-stratification weights were applied to align the sample to population characteristics of the state’s overall registered voter population. The results are subject to a sampling error of approximately +/-3 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Results based on subgroups of this population would be subject to larger margins of sampling error.

Given that the sampling frame is only composed of registered voters, our findings are only generalizable to California’s registered voter population and not to the state’s general population.

Limitations
Sub-groups of California residents who were not registered to vote were excluded from the sampling frame. Approximately 80% of eligible Californians are registered to vote [34]; thus, the remaining fifth of eligible voters, lawful permanent residents, undocumented immigrants, and Californians who have been convicted of a felony are not represented in our sample.

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