

JANUARY 2026

2026 Policy and Advocacy Agenda: *Anchoring Hope in Collective Action*

Founded in 1969, the [**National Employment Law Project \(NELP\)**](#) is a leading national nonprofit advocating for a good-jobs economy where all workers can thrive.

As we enter 2026, working people are organizing, resisting, and holding the vision for a more just, good-jobs economy. Our movement is anchoring hope in collective action even as the cost of living rises, workers' rights are under attack, and corporations continue to pursue profit through practices that erode rights and deepen inequality.

Longstanding inequities—rooted in race, gender, and immigration status—are reinforced by policy decisions that leave Black, brown, immigrant, and low-wage workers most exposed to harm. The Trump Administration continues to weaken civil rights laws and labor standards and undercut the agencies meant to protect workers. At the same time, corporations increasingly surveil workers with algorithmic systems, misclassify workers as independent contractors, and fail to protect against dangerous climate hazards.

Even in this landscape, workers are pushing back—and winning meaningful gains. With our 2026 agenda, NELP is meeting this moment by advancing policies that raise standards, strengthen labor protections enforcement, and bolster a resilient ecosystem of worker-led organizations driving change. This year, we are investing in regional leadership and capacity in the Midwest and Southwest to strengthen state-based campaigns, incubate and replicate proven worker-centered policies, and facilitate alignment around a shared good-jobs economy agenda.

Raising Pay and Improving Conditions for Workers

Workers—especially women and Black, immigrant, and other workers of color—are bearing the brunt of an affordability crisis. Wages are stagnant while housing and food costs rise. In response, states and localities are raising wage floors, improving job protections, and defending local democracy. In 2026, NELP will help drive this momentum by [supporting wage-raising and indexing campaigns](#) in half a dozen states and localities—including New York City, where affordability is now a central political priority—and by working with national partners to set the stage for the next wave of ambitious, worker-centered living-wage policies.

We will also continue advancing justice for app-based, misclassified, temporary, and contracted workers—people excluded from basic protections by deliberate corporate design. As [one rideshare driver](#) put it, “These companies... take 70 or even 80 percent of the fare and leave us with crumbs.” To expose these abuses, we will work to pass the [Empowering App-Based Workers Act](#), a federal bill

that requires platforms to reveal how they use data and algorithms to set pay, assign work, and discipline workers. The bill aims to bring long-overdue transparency and curb discrimination. At the local and state levels, we will work with partners to win minimum pay standards, access to benefits, and protections against unfair deactivations for app-based workers. And we will support e-commerce warehouse and delivery workers as they demand accountability and confront abusive industry practices through innovative policy campaigns in Chicago and New York.

We will also confront the rise of [bossware](#)—corporations' digital surveillance and algorithmic decision-making systems that increasingly shape work opportunities, pay, scheduling, and discipline. In 2026, NELP will work with policymakers and advocates to advance meaningful guardrails to protect workers, including protections against the spread of individualized [“surveillance” wage setting](#) aimed at driving down pay for workers. At the state and local level, we will support reforms in potentially a dozen states to secure fair pay standards, improve working conditions, and limit unfair firings. We will bring our legal, policy, and research expertise to help deliver durable reforms that are meaningful to workers.

Expanding Opportunity and Worker Protections

A just economy [requires strong, accessible unemployment insurance \(UI\)](#). Across the country, too many workers are shut out of benefits when they lose work—especially low-paid workers, part-time workers, and workers of color. Building on recent progress in states, NELP will continue to lead a strengthened UI Movement Network—bringing together national leaders, legal advocates, and state groups to coordinate strategy and push for reforms. Federally, we will push for broadened UI coverage, raised benefit levels, extended benefit duration, and improvements in program resilience. In Connecticut, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, and Virginia, we will support state campaigns in 2026 to break down the barriers that keep jobless workers from accessing the support they need.

Our work to expand opportunity also means confronting discrimination that keeps too many workers—women, Black workers, immigrants, and people with records—locked out of good jobs. In 2026, NELP will advance fair-chance hiring, challenge discriminatory workplace practices, and support reforms that reduce employers' overreliance on background checks.

We will also defend and expand protections for immigrant workers, who face disproportionate exploitation and retaliation. Nationally, we will work to safeguard worker protections and constitutional rights under assault from abusive immigration enforcement that erodes the rights of all workers. In states such as California, Illinois, New Mexico, New York, and Washington, we will support efforts to pass policies that expand immigrant workers' rights, strengthen anti-retaliation protections, and hold abusive employers accountable.

Strengthening Labor Enforcement and Building Worker Power

Winning rights is only the first step; workers must be able to count on agencies to enforce them. In 2026, NELP will push for stronger labor enforcement systems that prioritize the workers most harmed by wage theft and unsafe conditions. We will partner with worker-led organizations to strengthen the ecosystem that makes worker organizing and representation possible. Nationwide, we will test and refine multi-entity organizational models that build worker associations and enable them to carry out

worksite organizing that opens pathways to independent unionization. Through cohort learning, training, legal and technical assistance, and regranting—including expanded support in California—we will help grow the infrastructure workers need to secure lasting gains. And we will strengthen strategic enforcement partnerships that align community groups and government agencies to deliver real improvements for workers.

Climate change is a growing public health threat in the workplace, exposing both indoor and outdoor workers, especially farmworkers, warehouse workers and others laboring in extreme conditions—to dangerous heat and unhealthy air quality. NELP will drive worker-centered climate-safety campaigns to secure strong protections from extreme heat and wildfire smoke. In Illinois, New York, New Jersey, and Virginia, we will back efforts to reintroduce and pass heat-protection bills. In New Mexico and Washington, we will bring policy expertise to inform rulemaking. And in Colorado, Hawaii, Michigan, Minnesota, and Pennsylvania, we will help build coalitions that set new priorities for climate-related job standards. As core partners in a national coalition, we will coordinate strategy and craft model policies to win robust state heat-protection standards.

Looking Ahead

Our 2026 agenda reflects an affirmative vision: a good-jobs economy in which all workers can have financial stability, exercise their rights, and shape the future of their communities. We are strengthening the foundations of economic security, expanding the rights that protect working people, and defending the public institutions that make democracy real. Whether we are raising wages, expanding UI, safeguarding immigrant workers, confronting bossware, or securing climate protections, NELP will advance the policies and build the power that move us toward an economy where all workers have dignity and opportunity.