

# A TALE OF **TWO STATES**

STATE OF BLACK GEORGIA 2022



Urban League of  
Greater Atlanta

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# Message from the President



## Why the State of Black Georgia Report

The manifestations of centuries-long systemic and institutionalized racial prejudice lurk deep beneath the surface and rise above glaringly in a series of laws and practices that limit the everyday lives of Black people and other people of color throughout our nation.

Statistically, Georgia is one of the worst offenders. In this, the Urban League of Greater Atlanta's inaugural State of Black Georgia report, we present factual data on the plight of Black people and communities of color, and we delve into the reasons behind the numbers.

Our research offers a clear explanation of why so many Black people remain mired in generational poverty, through no fault of their own. Through this exploration of urgent issues that stymie growth and prosperity in Black and other communities of color in Georgia, we intend to encourage equitable policies, practices, and legislation that can lead to sustainable change that has eluded us for centuries.

It is often reported that Black people are disproportionately living in poverty; that Black men, especially, are ensnared in the criminal justice system and sent to prison at a rate far outpacing their percent of the population; that Black women die of complications from childbirth more than three times higher than White women; that people of color are underrepresented in the halls of the Georgia State legislature and in corporate executive suites; and that students of color are more likely to attend inadequately funded public schools and to enter school without early childhood learning experiences equaling those of their White peers.

## But why is this happening year to year, decade to decade?

In our analysis and in a series of essays in this report, you will learn exactly how an interlocking deck has been stacked against Black people and other people of color -- sometimes in a carefully coordinated manner at the highest political and legislative levels and sometimes as a result of historical, private sector patterns that oppress Blacks and other “minorities.” The legally enshrined measures that serve to hold entire communities back and the patterns that reflect those laws both remain a cancer on our society, threatening the stability of our state and nation, and everyone’s future.

The State of Black Georgia report is inspired by the National Urban League’s State of Black America report that has been released to wide acclaim annually since 1976 under the stewardship of the organization’s fifth president, a native Georgian, Vernon E. Jordan. The NUL report addresses racial equality in the areas of economics, employment, education, health, housing, transportation, criminal justice, and civic participation. It also has served as a guide for thought-leaders committed to making our nation a more just place for all who live, work, and visit here.

Similarly, the State of Black Georgia report will address these sectors. We decided to target six cities/regions that represent the social, cultural, and economic hubs for Black Georgians - Albany, Atlanta, Augusta, Columbus, Macon, and Savannah. We also convened Black leaders across Rural Georgia to gain perspectives on these focus areas from their point of view.

This allows us to highlight similarities in the manifestation of institutional racism city to city and across the state, and to target solutions for implementation at the local, county and state levels. In this manner, we have a chance to work together to change the trajectory of the lives of hundreds of thousands of Black people and other people of color and make Georgia a model for our nation.

Throughout the production of this report, we have been welcomed in the six cities/regions at the community level and by allies who agree that equal and equitable justice and economic opportunity for all will enhance the lives of everyone, no matter what race, creed, or color. The leaders in the public, private and nonprofit sectors who are working with us all agree that racial oppression and poverty work against the common good and our society as a whole. And that if we don’t fix these problems, we will leave a weakened state and nation for the next generations. Inaction now will exacerbate the social and economic challenges that are being driven by the widening racial wealth gap.

Please read this report carefully with an eye toward understanding how we reached this crisis of huge racial disparities and inequities and how you can become engaged in influencing positive change. Your choices for making a positive difference are virtually endless. Everyone of all ages, races, genders, and religions can play a role starting in our own families, homes, workplaces, social settings, and places of worship.

Together, we can end poverty and despair for families, small businesses and struggling communities across our state. We can build systems that assure equity in education, employment, health and well-being, housing and environmental decisions, training and workforce development, broadband access, voting rights, policing and criminal justice, small business development, access to capital and contracting, and more.

I am grateful for the ULGA SOBG Team (John Moyer, Dr. Ed Smith, Lurma Rackley, Beverly Iseghohi, Nichola Hines, Kennedy Smith, DeShaun Blake, Bridget Wiles and APD Urban, Bridget Fields and Andrew Frazier and DesignShow Marketing) and the many civil rights, community, academic, business, faith-based, civic, and professional experts and community leaders who serve as collaborators and contributors to our inaugural State of Black Georgia report. And to all the men, women, and youth who shared with us their experiences in a series of “community listening sessions” in the six cities/regions and rural Georgia where we met with them.

I also am grateful to you for reading this report. I hope it will inspire you to commit your time and talent to the ideal of a State of Black Georgia we can build with pride together.

*Nancy Flake Johnson*

## Overview

The median wealth of Blacks will fall to **zero by 2053** if no action is taken.

Under Georgia Milestones testing for the 2021-22 school year, 21.9% of Georgia's Black students in the fourth grade are reading at or above a proficient level.

Approximately **50% of the inmates** admitted in the Georgia Department of Corrections in 2021 were Black, yet Black Georgians make up 32% of the State's population.

**Fifty-four percent** of infant deaths were Black children.

Recent redistricting in the state's new maps systematically weaken the political strength of Black Georgians, ensuring that despite the tremendous growth in Georgia's Black population, Black voters in Georgia will have few, if any, new political opportunities in their state's House and Senate.

These startling facts should give pause to every Georgian. Black people make up nearly one-third of the state's population, and while about two-thirds of that number suffer disproportionately from financial instability, low literacy rates, neighborhood disinvestment, and chronic disease, all Black people in the state are vulnerable to over-criminalization and voter suppression.

The Urban League of Greater Atlanta is tackling these issues by drawing attention to them in this timely publication: **the State of Black Georgia Report**. Since 1920, ULGA has been dedicated to closing the economic and social justice gaps between Black Americans and their White counterparts throughout the metro-Atlanta area.

To guide its statewide analysis of the top issues, the report explores conditions in six metropolitan areas: Albany, Atlanta, Augusta, Columbus, Macon, and Savannah, and rural Georgia. The metropolitan areas serve as political, economic, and social hubs for Black Americans in the state of Georgia.

The report takes a qualitative and quantitative snapshot of Georgia's economic, health, social justice, civic engagement, and educational indicators. It offers publicly accessible data to provide a baseline for community groups and local stakeholders to examine progress in their respective communities.

Based on information gathered in community stakeholder meetings and site visits held in the six key cities, and the expertise and insights of state and local community leaders, the report identifies policies that can be advanced on the local, state, and federal levels to improve the lives of Black Georgians and other persons of color.

Furthermore, the report references the formidable contribution Black Georgians have made to the state's economy over the centuries -- from the high revenue-yielding industries like pre-Reconstruction large-scale farming, to post-Reconstruction music, film, and television.

The report provides state- and local-level data tables as snapshots of publicly accessible economic, health, civic engagement, education, and social justice data community stakeholders can use to support policy formation. We developed our Policy Recommendations from these tools, insights gained directly from our community conversations and site visits, and by in-depth state and local data analysis, and knowledge amassed from local and state-wide leaders on the key issues facing Black Georgians.

**The State of Black Georgia** is an educational tool and call to action for Black Georgians, public and private sector stakeholders and the general public that can inform civic engagement, non-profit organizations, elected officials, businesses, policy makers, grass roots organizations, philanthropists, faith-based organizations, researchers, advocates, and other key stakeholders. Together, we can promote inclusive economic development, influential partnerships, and implementation of best practice models that foster overall improvement in conditions for Georgia's Black residents and the state as a whole.

Finally, the State of Black Georgia Report is ULGA's first step in reporting the critical condition of vulnerable Black communities. Yet with all the heavy conditions stacked against Black people, we recognize there is incremental progress born out of determination and resilience. Without the resilience of stalwart enslaved people determined to learn how to read and write despite prohibitions against their literacy, Historically Black Colleges and Universities would not exist today. Without Georgians over the decades pushing forward in spite of the stings of institutional racism and bias, we would not have benefitted from the contributions they have made to education, health, business, and politics.

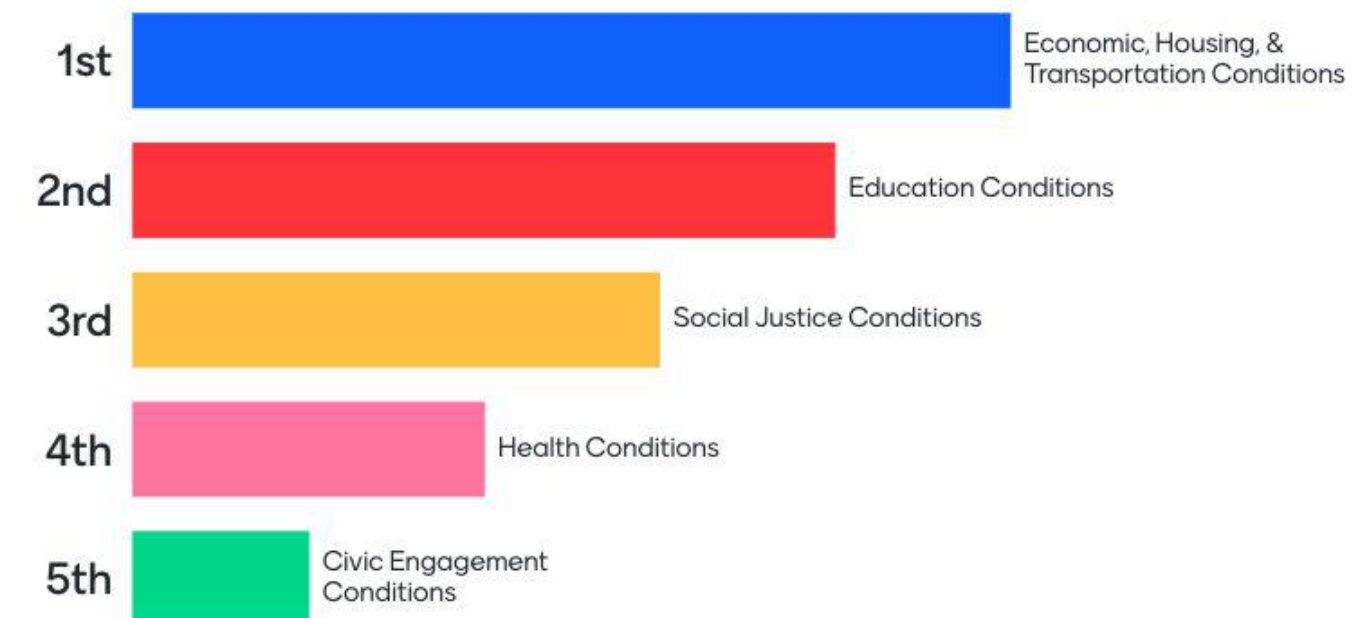
We celebrate these trailblazing Georgians' determination. And we recognize the gains made by contemporary Black people who continue to contribute across every critical sector in the state of Georgia. Inspired by their extraordinary will to insist on freedom and equality, we forge ahead to strengthen families and build prosperous businesses and thriving communities.

## **State of Black Georgia: Community Issues Rankings**

The report's Community Issues Rankings were informed by a series of in-person community conversations facilitated by the Urban League of Greater Atlanta during the summer and fall of 2022. The conversations engaged community members, local leadership, and key stakeholders in the six cities/regions across the State of Georgia. Participants explored the economic, education, social justice, health, and civic engagement conditions in their communities, discussed major barriers to advancement, shared critical work in progress, and offered suggestions, insight, and policy recommendations tailored to their regions.

As a component of our community conversations, participants were asked to rank the order of importance of issues facing their regions. Each response was weighted by rank order, then compiled to determine the State of Black Georgia Community Rankings. Economic conditions were ranked highest by our respondents, followed by Education, Social Justice, Health, and Civic Engagement.

## What is the most important issue facing the State of Georgia??



## Community Conversations: Common Themes

Outside of the data gained from our Community Issue Rankings, a key finding from our community conversations was that experiences in one community were not siloed to that community alone. Rather, we found commonality throughout our six focus areas across the state. This suggests that local issues and experiences may in fact be viewed from a state-level lens and provide for state-level solutions.

For example, inadequate access to livable wage employment opportunities via public transportation and childcare, in addition to a general lack of adequate affordable housing, were among the many economic themes rising to the top in our community conversations across the state. When discussing state and local education issues, participants in our community conversations expressed concern with inadequate investments in public education, learning gaps that were exacerbated by COVID-19, and limited access to broadband and distance learning.

In addition to these findings, unequal treatment by law enforcement, the killing of unarmed Black citizens, prison conditions, inordinate and mass incarceration, barriers to reentry, and the negative impact the criminal justice system has had on our communities came up consistently as issues of importance in the six cities. On the topic of healthcare, our community members offered insights on the harmful effects of hospital mergers and closings as well as inadequate healthcare coverage attributed in part to the state's refusal to expand Medicaid. And, when discussing civic engagement, many community members voiced concerns that gerrymandering and city/county consolidation diluted the power of Black voters and representation, leading to the subsequent loss of economic and political power.

In addition to our community conversations and site visits with stakeholders, the ULGA enlisted statewide experts in the focus areas of the report - economics (including workforce, housing, small business etc.), education, health, civic engagement, and social justice, to shed additional light on the issues and opportunities. We are pleased to present this collection of essays that not only provide further context on the issues but also share policy solutions and other recommendations to improve the lives of Black Georgians.

## State & Local Data

To support key findings and policy formation and to inform the conclusions reached in the report, we compiled state and local data that provided snapshots on the status of Black communities. The Urban League engaged APD-Urban, an urban planning and research firm, to collect the data on the economic, transportation, housing, education, employment, small business and health conditions affecting Black Georgians. The findings offer roadmaps to remedy the obstacles to the well-being of Black Georgians, who according to the 2020 census are approximately 32% of the state's population, and 29% of the active voting population (reported by the Georgia Secretary of State's Office).

For example, 42% of households with no computer are Black households, and over 60% of those who rely on public transportation to get to work are Black. Furthermore, the data indicate that only 15% of Black households are owner-occupied, compared to 44% for White Georgians. In addition, data from the Coastal Georgia Indicators Coalition for 2022 show White household median income at \$77,581 and \$52,765 for Black households.

The education data indicate that a lower percentage of Black Georgians are in preschool than their White counterparts. Health data indicate higher asthma rates in the Black community, and that over 50% of the fetal deaths in the state are Black.

We depended on publicly accessible data sources throughout this analysis to encourage replication by local community groups. Our data sources include Black Wealth Center, GA Dept. of Public Health, GA Secretary of State, GA Dept. of Community Affairs, Home Mortgage Disclosure Act (HMDA), US Dept. of Transportation, US Census, Kaiser Family Foundation, and others.

Thank you for reading the State of Black Georgia report and for supporting the work of the Urban League of Greater Atlanta. Through this report we hope that you find, as we do, the current state of Black Georgia unacceptable. Join us in the effort to eliminate barriers to opportunities for Black Georgians, other people of color, and those in poorly-serviced rural communities to strengthen our state for all Georgians.





**State of Black Georgia**

**Key Findings by  
Focus Area**

# Black Georgians and the Economy

## ① Key Findings / Economics

### Racial Income and Wealth Gap

Wealth inequality in the United States is at an all-time high. The richest 400 people in America own more wealth than the bottom 185 million people combined. Inequity in wealth is the primary perpetrator of racial and economic inequality and is undoubtedly the most consequential human and civil rights issue of our times.<sup>1</sup>

According to [Area Development magazine](#),<sup>2</sup> Georgia has been ranked as the top state for business for nine consecutive years. Yet the US Census Bureau ranks Georgia among the top 10 states for poverty in the nation (Census, 2020).

The median household income for a Black family in the State of Georgia is 46,964, whereas the median household income for all races is \$61,224.<sup>3</sup>

- Of the total population below the poverty line, 44% are Black (Census, 2020).
- Of the total households that do not have a computer, 42% are Black (Census, 2020).
- Of the total workers that commute to work via public transportation, 62% are Black (Census, 2020).
- Of the total unemployed population, 48% are Black (Census, 2020).
- Of the total businesses in the State of Georgia, only 6% were Black owned (ABS, 2020).

Atlanta is the number one city for income inequality in the U.S.<sup>4</sup>

- The median household income for a Black family is \$28,105; a white family's median income is \$83,722.
- If a person is born into poverty in Atlanta, there is just a 4% chance of escaping poverty in her or his lifetime.
- Almost 70% of Black families are liquid asset poor compared to 22% of White families.

### Minimum and Livable Wage in Georgia

The post-COVID changes in the job market have not lifted lower-income residents out of poverty. The minimum wage in the state of Georgia<sup>5</sup> remains at \$5.15 an hour even though the Federal minimum wage of \$7.25 normally applies. WABE reported in 2019 that 2% of the state's population worked at the bottom rung of \$5.15 per hour, a rate that has remained the same for more than 15 years.<sup>6</sup> Twenty-nine states plus the District of Columbia, Guam, and the Virgin Islands have set their minimum wage higher than the federal rate, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.<sup>6</sup>

The Annie E. Casey Foundation Child Well-Being in Single-Parent Families Report<sup>7</sup> states 64% of Black children nationwide are being raised in a single-parent-led household. With the livable wage skyrocketing to \$28 per hour in Fulton County for a dual-income, three-child household<sup>8</sup> single-led household earners must upskill to earn twice as much to meet a family's basic needs.

Add to the equation the sharp increase in rents across the state post-pandemic, and Georgians who are working hard every day - with a disproportionate number of them Black and Brown -- are not earning enough to pay their bills. This is having a direct impact on housing instability and homelessness and exacerbates the state's already high rates of poverty.

The low minimum wage especially hurts Black Georgians because, in major population centers, a large percentage of minimum wage workers are Black. As noted by the Brookings Institute<sup>9</sup> in metro-Atlanta, 39% of low-wage workers are Black; in Macon 64% of low-wage workers are Black; and in Savannah 50% of low-wage workers are Black. In order to create better outcomes for Black Georgians, it is important that labor be compensated fairly.

In addition, all workers, with an emphasis on under-skilled, unemployed, and underemployed Georgians, should be made aware of and given equitable access to secondary and post-secondary occupational skills training in the state's high demand sectors (healthcare, IT, construction, transportation and logistics, film and television, fin-tech etc.) so they can attain higher and livable wage employment.

Furthermore, the Georgia Chamber of Commerce<sup>10</sup> notes that over 50% of the state's counties are distressed, with many areas in rural Georgia losing workforce and population to the major metropolitan areas across the state. Whether they are residents of metropolitan Georgia cities or rural Georgia towns, Black Georgians remain blocked from pathways to wealth building. For example, less than 50% Black Georgians are homeowners, slightly above the national average.

A 2022 CNN report noted, "More Americans own a home now than in any year following the Great Recession, with the US homeownership rate climbing to 65.5% in 2020, according to NAR [National Association of Realtors]. That's up 1.3% from 2019, the largest annual increase on record. ... But Black homeownership, at 43.4%, remains lower than it was a decade ago. And it is nearly 30 percentage points behind the White homeownership rate of 72.1%. Meanwhile, the Hispanic homeownership rate rose to an all-time high, reaching over 50% for the first time, and the Asian homeownership rate is 61.7%."<sup>11</sup>

## *Access to Home Ownership and Affordable Housing*

Homeownership is often the basis of economic security and the development of generational wealth. While homeownership is still a goal for many Americans, Black Americans often find their dream harder to attain than their White counterparts. For example, of the number of Georgia mortgage applications that were denied to female households, 44% were Black, and of all renter-occupied households, 45% are Black.

The combination of high rents, coupled with low wages, makes it nearly impossible to save for a down payment on a home. And while many low-income Black households are housing insecure and unable to attain homeownership, metro Atlanta has a high number of mortgage-ready prospective homebuyers, including over 176,000 millennials, according to the Urban Institute.<sup>12</sup> But they are not able to purchase homes due to the shortage in affordable housing inventory, driven in part by predatory corporate investors buying up the affordable stock.

Without state and local legislative intervention to block institutional investors from acquiring available affordable housing units, Blacks will continue to lag behind in homeownership even if they have the credit score and down payment saved and available. The state needs to increase homeownership assistance programs and public-private partnerships that can create affordable living options throughout the state. If there is no intervention by the state, historical practices of disinvestment in Black low-income and rural communities, redlining, and limited access to mortgage and small business capital will continue to harm Black people directly and disproportionately in a state diversifying faster than most other U.S. cities.

## *Georgia's Demographic Shift*

The racial colorization of Georgia does not show signs of improving Black Georgian's financial health. A Georgia Budget and Policy Institute report presents new estimates that show how the state's population is predicted to diversify over the next 30 years and a case for why clearing the obstacles that hinder BIPOC communities is the best economic approach for Georgia lawmakers.<sup>13</sup>

People of color could account for about 85 percent of new Georgians over the next decade or about 3.2 million of a projected 3.8 million new state residents. Georgia is estimated to add 1.2 million Latinos, 826,000 Asians, 751,000 Blacks, and 421,000 people who categorize as Other between 2020 and 2050, alongside 582,000 new White residents. But Black representation in the state does not correlate into higher per capita income. For example, Black Georgians lack a competitive edge in the state's fastest growing industry: information technology

## *Broadband Access*

IT is the state's fastest growing industry. Too many Black people lack access to broadband and resources to develop IT skills in a period when the criticality of Broadband access has never been higher.

Georgia's economy has changed since the COVID-19 pandemic, and communities are working to adjust to the new economic reality. For example, many communities outside of urban areas have had to rely more than ever on remote and hybrid work, but those without access to high-speed internet and broadband and digital literacy skills are locked out.

A Census Bureau report<sup>14</sup> states that the rate of working entirely remotely tripled to 17.9% between 2019 and 2021. In order to work from home, one needs to have reliable access to Wi-Fi and/or other internet services and the appropriate digital literacy skills. Though Wi-Fi access is less of a concern for major metropolitan areas, in Rural Georgia access is harder to come by.

As noted by the Atlanta Journal-Constitution in a 2020 article<sup>15</sup> by Mark Niese "over 507,000 homes and businesses, about 10% of the rural population, lack access to adequate internet signals, and some areas are almost completely offline." Furthermore, according to the 2020 Census data, of the total population of households that have broadband internet, less than 30% are Black.

According to the most recent 2022 Georgia State IT Report<sup>16</sup> issued by the Georgia Technology Authority, Georgia's Broadband Map documents 454,950 unserved addresses of which approximately 90% are in rural parts of Georgia. A significant number of rural locations still lack broadband coverage, and others suffer gaps in coverage.

Lack of internet access affects many economic factors like educational attainment, information gathering, the ability to work from home, and securing employment, as many employers now require online applications for hiring. It also affects social mobility, as those who are not connected to the internet cannot fully engage in the economy. Notably, the Georgia County with one of the most predominantly Black populations, Hancock County, is one of the 28 Georgia counties that will be eligible for much-needed broadband expansion.<sup>17</sup>

The economic impact of the digital divide is clear. Almost 30 million jobs were lost across the US when COVID hit, and unemployment in Georgia rose to above 14% at the height of the pandemic, according to multiple sources. The Department of Labor reports that Georgia has only regained about 85% of those jobs lost, falling in the "middle of the pack" in terms of state recovery. Experts say that while 85% is a significant number, the jobs that have come back are different in nature than pre-pandemic, and many pre-COVID jobs will NOT be recovered. Increasing the number of Black people in the IT sector can have a positive impact on closing the racial wealth gap.

The high-tech sector has become a major source of economic growth fueling the U.S. economy and, according to the US Equal Opportunity Employment Commission's Special Report on Diversity in High Tech, the percentage of Black employees in high-tech industries is 7.4%, yet about 13% of the U.S. population is Black.

The Urban League's Tech and Digital Learning Academy will become a pipeline for Black IT talent and closing the racial wealth gap. The average Information Technology salary in the United States is \$204,608 as of Sept. 27, 2021. The range for the most popular Information Technology positions typically falls between \$58,808 and \$350,408.

There is some good news with respect to broadband access and investments in the state. According to the 2022 Georgia State IT Report, the state is making over \$700 million in broadband investments. The report notes that "on February 1, 2022, the Governor announced almost \$408 million in preliminary awards that will provide communities, households, and businesses in 70 Georgia counties access to faster and more reliable broadband.

"The projects targeted with the awards could serve 183,615 locations, of which 132,050 are currently unserved based on state data. These grant projects represent an investment of more than \$738 million when matching funds are contributed. That makes this the largest public investment in broadband deployment infrastructure in the state's history," the report noted.

## Black Businesses

Minorities are expected to makeup 50.4% of Georgia's population by 2030. However, spending with minority-owned businesses does not reflect the same extent of diversity.<sup>18</sup> According to a data analysis by Yelp, Atlanta has the highest rate of Black-owned businesses in the U.S. -- 7.4% of businesses in the Georgia metro area are Black-owned, up from 6.7% in the 2021 report, when Atlanta tied for No. 3.<sup>19</sup>

Despite the surge, Black entrepreneurs in Atlanta and across the state face a disproportionate number of challenges. First, they have fewer financial means to grow and develop their businesses than White entrepreneurs. In the U.S., among Blacks who applied for credit in 2021, 46% were denied or approved for less than they requested, according to a LendingTree study<sup>20</sup> on racial disparities. That compares with 22% of Whites.

Study after study has shown how the racial wealth gap and implicit bias have limited access to capital for Black entrepreneurs. We need to build the supporting ecosystems to mitigate the institutional barriers<sup>21</sup> that lead to less access to venture and debt capital and dimmer prospects for business growth by Black-owned businesses. Even when controlling for factors such as "firm characteristics and performance," Black-owned businesses are still 20 percent less likely than white-owned businesses to obtain a loan from a large bank.<sup>22</sup>

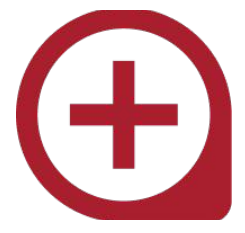
Additionally, the lack of adequate communications tactics and a paucity of financial education and networks make it challenging for Black entrepreneurs to sustain a business.

To be sure, Covid-19 has exacerbated some of the issues facing the Black community. Black entrepreneurs have had to close their doors at more than twice the rate of their White counterparts.<sup>23</sup> And while the killing of George Floyd by a White police officer in May 2020 renewed interest in supporting the economic advancement of Black people, sales at many Black-owned businesses soon plummeted back to their pre-Covid rates.

To address the barriers, elected officials, government, public and private-sector leaders and investors can invest in and support Black business owners and their firms by focusing on capitalization, education and mentoring.



**Education, Technical Assistance and Networking** - Expanded support should be invested in high performing non-profit, educational, and community-based entrepreneurship and small business technical assistance providers to support laying a solid foundation for Black business acumen to foster start-ups, growth and expansion by government, private and social sectors.



**Expand Access to State, County, Municipal and Private Sector Procurement Markets** - The state of Georgia is ranked number one for business for the past 9 consecutive years yet the statistics are clear that doesn't include Black owned firms. The state's track record for doing business with Black businesses is startling. Two disparity studies have been conducted by the Georgia Department of Transportation in 2012<sup>24</sup> and 2016<sup>25</sup> and reveal that only 2.4% and 1% respectively of GADOT procurements were awarded to Black businesses while the available capacity for Black firms was much higher. There is some movement in the right direction with Representative Roger Bruce's and others continued efforts to introduce a bill to establish an Office of Minority Business in 2022 and expand data collection across all state agencies. Subsequent to the Bill being introduced, Governor Kemp signed an Executive Order in July 2022 to create a full-time Small Business and Supplier Diversity Manager position and the Georgia Department of Administrative Services issued a Small Business and Supplier Diversity Report in October 2022<sup>26</sup> that makes 9 recommendations for small and minority business support. However, for real movement to address the deep disparities that exist, significantly more financial and staff resources must be invested in state-wide action-oriented, equity focused strategies as a priority to measurably expand MBE utilization. The anchor institutions and the private sector must also expand their supplier diversity efforts and invest more resources in MBE development and capital investments.



**Increase Access to Capital** - There is a desperate need for greater access to capital for Black businesses to start, expand and grow to scale. In 2022, "U.S. Black founders raised an estimated \$2.254 billion out of the \$215.9 billion in U.S. venture capital allocated last year. That's about 1%, a slight drop from the 1.3% raised in 2021." More targeted venture capital funds must be established to specifically invest in Black and other minority firms to tap into the growth potential that exists in these firms. Further, more supervision and accountability of banking institutions and their lending practices and production must be stepped up and a fresh assessment of the effectiveness of the Community Reinvestment Act is required, to eliminate racial bias in lending practices, data collection and decisions. Without access to capital, Black businesses cannot grow.



**Rethink Communications Tactics** - Financial institutions and investors must ultimately make the process of getting access to capital more accessible and user-friendly. Many small Black businesses may lack access to the resources and tools needed to apply for loans and financial support<sup>27</sup> offered by the government and private sector and have more limited access to venture capital resources than their White counterparts. More investment by institutional and wealthy investors in more venture capital, micro loan funds, federally supported CDFIs (Community Development Financial Institutions<sup>28</sup>) and other innovative funding mechanisms that are directly targeted to fund Black owned firms is required.

And finally, the urgency of now to prioritize closing the racial wealth gap is illuminated in The Road to Zero Wealth report published by Prosperity Now and the Institute for Policy Studies as it predicts that the median wealth of Black Americans will fall to zero by 2053<sup>29</sup> if current trends continue.

In the final analysis, Martin Luther King's dream of economic parity must be realized through an orchestrated effort to remove the racial barriers put in force more than 300 years ago. Georgia, home to the civil rights icon, should lead the way in showing the world how an inclusive economy can, and should, benefit everyone.

# Education for Black People in Georgia



## ① Key Findings / Education

### A Complicated History

The history of education for Blacks in America began in their ancestral homeland, Africa. For example, Mali, formerly the “Kingdom of Mali” in west Africa, was one of several slave export centers.<sup>1</sup> It was home to 14th and 15th century Timbuktu, known as the “City of Books.” Timbuktu was a mecca for knowledge seekers.<sup>2</sup>

Africans who were taken captive and shipped to the U.S. during the 17th to 18th century lost contact with the culture of scholarship. For several generations, their education was limited primarily to the oral history elder enslaved people told to the young or formal lessons people risked their lives and freedom to teach.

In Georgia, legislation passed in 1829 made it a crime to teach slaves to read. White settlers’ discouraged literacy within Georgia’s small free Black community. Yet when schools for freed people opened in early 1865, they were crowded to overflowing.

Meanwhile, Congress created the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, popularly known as the Freedmen’s Bureau.<sup>3</sup> Freed men supplemented the Freedmen’s Bureau aid. They paid monthly tuition fees, raised funds for teachers’ room and board, purchased lots for schoolhouses, and donated material and labor to build them. They also created and supported schools that were independent of northern efforts.

In winter and between planting and harvesting, fathers and mothers studied beside their children in Freedmen’s schools. To meet the demand for education from adults who could not attend regular classes, the teachers organized night schools and Sabbath-day schools.<sup>4</sup> Adult students were also served by formal secondary and higher education institutions including normal schools for teacher training in Macon,<sup>5</sup> Columbus,<sup>6</sup> Savannah,<sup>7</sup> preparatory schools attached to colleges, and the colleges themselves, among them: Atlanta University, Clark College (later Clark Atlanta University<sup>8</sup>), and the Augusta Institute (later Morehouse College<sup>9</sup>).

Black people had a hunger to learn. The freed men’s proactive measures to acquire education for their own community represent one of their first acts of self-determination.

By the time the state made its first effort to create public schools, freed men had already created a foundation for Black student education. So, it came as no surprise that Reconstruction-era legislation required segregated schools and allowed discrimination in the distribution of school funds to White and Black schools.<sup>10</sup>

From 1870 until well into the 20th century, White Georgians sought to limit public funding for Black education. Local districts refused to support public secondary education for Black students. Litigation helped to reinforce separate and unequal education in the state. In 1896, the Supreme Court case, *Plessy vs Ferguson*, extended segregation to all facets of life, including education. It took another 50 years for the Supreme Court, in the case *Brown vs the Board of Education*, to order desegregation in 1954. That was strenuously ignored and resisted throughout the state, with Atlanta schools desegregating in 1961 and other jurisdictions slowly following through the end of the decade. Into the 21st century, the enduring effects of segregation in modern Georgia schools still exist.

## *Integrated But Unequal - The Enduring Effects of Segregation in Modern Georgia*

Today, equity in education continues to elude Black students. Public schools that serve a majority Black student population are typically underfunded and under-supported by government action.

The findings from a 2018 Georgia Budget and Policy Institute Study are disturbing. According to the Institute, 61% of Georgia [public school] students come from economically disadvantaged homes, living at or near the poverty line, and family income is closely linked to educational attainment.<sup>10</sup> Students who live in poverty are more likely to face the challenges of housing instability, lack of access to high-quality out-of-school resources, and toxic stress, which all impede school success. Fixing school funding shortcomings can play a major role in improving student achievement, especially for children who live in poverty.

At the time of the GBPI study, “The state of Georgia withheld \$9 billion from public schools over the last fifteen years.”<sup>11</sup> The crisis in education for Georgia’s Black children draws attention from all quarters of the Black community.

During the summer of 2022, the Urban League of Greater Atlanta traveled throughout Georgia to explore the state’s education system. Through our research we gained further insight on the impacts low literacy, high dropout rates, inadequate Pre-K options, and COVID-related challenges with virtual learning and learning loss have had on the Black community.

The residents’ concerns, raised during our series of community conversations, were reflected in research that highlighted the historic educational inequities facing Black Georgians.

For example, in a 2022 analysis of education performance, funding, safety, class size, and instructor credentials, GA ranked 36th in the nation.<sup>11</sup> A disproportionate burden from this lack of performance falls on schools attended by students from low-income and minority group families.

It is abundantly clear that Georgia’s policies and priorities help to perpetuate second tier education for Black students. For example, the state’s formula used to determine resource allocation puts low-income students at a significant disadvantage



## Public School Spending Policies and QBE Formula

Georgia relies on the 1985 Quality Basic Education Act (QBE) funding formula to allocate public school resources, which has not been updated to address the extraordinary needs of low performing schools predominantly in Black, rural and minority communities that will require equitable investments of resources to address disparities. Nor does the QBE formula allocate additional funding for students living in poverty. This has resulted in nearly 30 years of disproportionate investments in education in low- to moderate-income communities that need education the most to gain economic mobility opportunities.<sup>12</sup>

## Early Childhood Education

According to the Georgia Department of Education, Georgia law requires that students attend a public or private school or a home study program from their 6th to their 16th birthdays. Public Kindergarten is available in every school system, but it is not mandatory.

The National Education Association (NEA) concludes that Universal Pre-K and Kindergarten give children the foundation they need for a lifetime of learning and success. The NEA further concludes that “providing a high-quality education for children before they turn 5 yields significant medium- and long-term benefits for students. Children in early childhood education programs are:

- o Less likely to repeat a grade.
- o Less likely to be identified as having special needs.
- o More prepared academically for later grades.
- o More likely to graduate from high school.
- o More likely to become higher earners in the workforce.

Source:

[www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/action-center/our-issues/early-childhood-education&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1680000791715899&usg=AOvVaw1WtkAsl4yvwzXaPPLJfqsP](http://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/action-center/our-issues/early-childhood-education&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1680000791715899&usg=AOvVaw1WtkAsl4yvwzXaPPLJfqsP)

A study conducted by Stanford University in 2013 concludes that “children’s vocabulary skills are linked to their economic backgrounds. By 3 years of age, there is a 30-million-word gap between children from the wealthiest and poorest families.”<sup>13</sup> Another study shows that the vocabulary gap is evident in toddlers. “By 18 months, children in different socio-economic groups display dramatic differences in their vocabularies.”<sup>14</sup> By 2 years, the disparity in vocabulary development has grown significantly.”<sup>15</sup> This is important because vocabulary development during the preschool years is related to later reading skills and school success in general.

## Low Literacy Skills Linked to Incarceration Rates

Literacy and reading levels by third grade are critical to a child’s academic success. In fact, a study by the Annie E. Casey Foundation found students who are not proficient in reading by the end of the third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school than proficient readers.

A study by the literacy advocacy organization Literacy Mid-South, concludes “... there is a strong connection between early low literacy skills and the U.S.’ exploding incarceration rates.”<sup>16</sup> The study further concludes:

- o 85 percent of all juveniles who interface with the juvenile court system are functionally low literate.
- o Juvenile incarceration reduces the probability of high school completion and increases the probability of incarceration later in life.
- o High school dropouts are 3.5 times more likely than high school graduates to be arrested in their lifetime.
- o High school dropouts are 63% more likely to be incarcerated than their peers with four-year college degrees.

These findings are alarming when you consider the third-grade reading stats for Georgia students. Station WRDW in Augusta, Georgia, reported on third grade reading scores for the state of Georgia in July 2022, based on a study by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.<sup>17</sup> The study found that 36% of third graders across Georgia are not reading at their grade level.

Findings from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in 2022 paint a more dire picture: Under Georgia Milestones testing for the 2021-22 school year, 21.9% of Georgia’s Black students in the fourth grade are reading at or above a proficient level. In other words, 78.1 percent of Black students in Georgia have not been taught to read proficiently by the end of third grade.

The percentage of Georgia Black students that are not reading at third grade level was 36%, a 25% increase over the pandemic, according to the study that further shows the following for Augusta metro area students<sup>18</sup>:

- Richmond County ranks number 24 out of Georgia’s 210 school districts. Test results show more than half of all third graders in Augusta will enter the fourth grade struggling to read.
- The number of third-grade students behind in reading grew 10 percent in both Richmond County and Burke County over the pandemic.

## The COVID Learning Crisis

The pandemic exacerbated existing education deficits in low literacy areas of the state. A state audit shows that Georgia K-12 students fell months behind while learning remotely during the pandemic. The loss of learning time and lack of access to Broadband were key contributing factors.

The World Economic Forum characterizes the effects of the pandemic on education as “pushing millions of children into learning poverty.”<sup>19</sup>

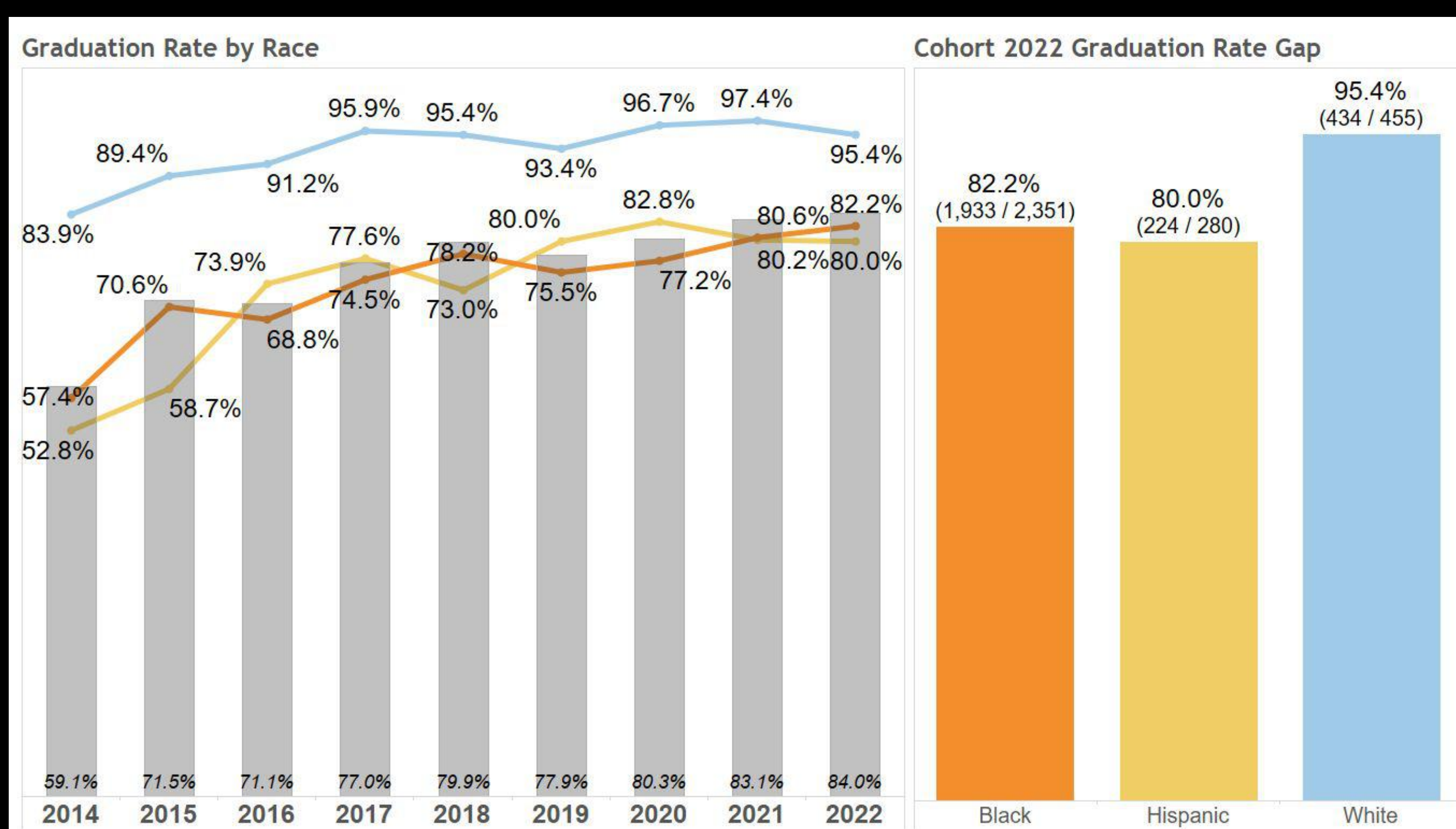
## Disparities in Disciplinary Actions

While most of the data we reviewed provide academic performance indicators, the disparity in disciplinary actions is most troubling because these interactions can lead to police-involved cases and blemished records.

Black students make up approximately 35% of K-12 students, yet Black students are punished more often and more severely than non-Black students. In Cobb County, for example, Black students make up 33% of the population, yet comprise over 50% of disciplinary action taken against students.<sup>20</sup>

## Improvement in Graduation Rates

While there is much cause for concern, there is a bright spot in data from Atlanta Public Schools. The data<sup>21</sup> show that graduation rates for Black students (82.2%) reached an all-time high with the 2022 cohort, while the rate for Hispanic students (80.0%) and White students (95.4%) was slightly lower than the cohort 2021 rates but higher than the pre-pandemic 2019 rates of 75.5% for Hispanic students and 93.4% for White students. Nearly 13 percentage points separated the graduation rates of Black students and White students. This is 4 percentage points lower than cohort 2021 difference. APS is making a concerted effort to lift the reading scores of its third graders.



### ***Higher Education: Scholarship Criteria***

Though Black students make up 36% of the state’s public high school graduates, the state’s flagship institution, the University of Georgia, reportedly enrolled only 6% of Black high school graduates in 2020; yet UGA receives more money in state appropriations than any other public institution in Georgia.<sup>22</sup>

According to a 2020 study conducted by the Georgia Budget & Policy Institute, “the state’s HOPE and the Zell Miller Scholarships fund tuition for 44% of Georgia’s undergraduate students, yet recipients of these scholarships are predominantly Asian and White students while Black and Native American students were least likely to receive the funds.”<sup>23</sup>

These scholarships are merit based only, limiting access by Black, Latino, rural and low-income students whose prospects are reduced most by the antiquated QBE funding formula. The formula leaves low performing schools, where many of the low-income Black, Latino, and rural students attend public school, at a disadvantage to compete for these resources despite the fact that these students need the scholarships the most to advance out of poverty. The merit-based formula results in students with middle class and above household income benefitting the most from the state scholarship programs. Consider these additional facts contained in the GBPI Report:

- o Black students made up only 6% of recipients for the Zell Miller Scholarship, despite making up 10% of the total undergraduate student population.
- o Students from families with higher incomes were also more likely to get these awards, the report found. Seven percent of Zell Miller Scholarship recipients have family incomes under \$15,000, while 31% have family incomes of \$120,000 or more.
- o University of Georgia students got twice the amount of HOPE Scholarship money as students in the entire Technical College System of Georgia, the report also found.

According to the Georgia Student Finance Commission, to be eligible for the Zell Miller Scholarship, students must graduate from high school with a 3.70 cumulative GPA as calculated by the Georgia Student Finance Commission (GSFC) AND an SAT score of 1200 OR an ACT score of 26. To be eligible for the HOPE Scholarship a recipient must graduate from high school with a minimum 3.00-grade point average (as calculated by GSFC) and maintain a minimum 3.00 cumulative postsecondary grade point average to remain eligible.

### ***Trajectory of Vulnerable Black Students***

According to the GBPI’s Overview: 2022 Fiscal Year Budget for the Georgia Department of Corrections, the cumulative statistics demonstrate what is driving the reason 60% of those incarcerated in Georgia are Black. More investments in Universal Pre-K and kindergarten and equitable investments in low performing schools in poverty-stricken communities will change the trajectory of Georgia’s Black students.

### ***Other Education Findings***

Despite inequities in Georgia’s education system, the State is home to 10 of the nation’s high performing Historically Black Colleges and Universities (Albany State University, Clark Atlanta University, Fort Valley State University, Interdenominational Theological Center, Morehouse College, Morehouse School of Medicine, Morris Brown College, Paine College, Savannah State University, and Spelman College).

Spelman College, a private women’s college located in Atlanta, consistently ranks as one of the top universities in the country.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, Georgia State University, an institution with a high percentage of minority students, was recently highlighted for awarding more bachelor’s degrees to African Americans than any other university in the nation.<sup>25</sup>

As stated earlier, founders established colleges like Clark Atlanta and Morehouse during a time when freed men zealously sought education for Black people. The continued existence of these institutions reminds us that education is a priority in the Black community and that the schools serve an important purpose in educating a demographic that thrives in those settings.

## *Community Priorities*

During our community conversations, residents reported concerns about education at all levels, to include access to quality early childhood education, quality K-12 instruction, college access and affordability, and meaningful vocational training options. Residents also expressed a desire to cultivate public-private partnerships to strengthen the relationships between local school systems and local employers, and supported increases in teacher pay that can improve retention and educational outcomes for students.

Understandably, community members noted that circumstances outside the classroom can have an impact on performance. This reinforces our goal of promoting holistic solutions and legislative policy recommendations to address systemic inequities that flow through a variety of sectors -- including housing, wages, transportation, internet access, environmental justice, parks and recreation, nutrition and healthcare, and criminal justice, and more - that influence a child's overall well-being and performance in our state's educational system.



## *Action Needed to Prepare for the Future*

The state would be well served to follow the example of 18th century freed men by making adequate resources available to those who need help most. The equitable allocation of education dollars is sorely needed. As thought leaders in education adopt new and evidence-based methods of instruction to improve student performance, they need to target these resources to schools and students who are left behind. As a state in the wealthiest country in the world, Georgia should not accept 35% or less of its Black population's failure to read proficiently by third grade. Taking pride in their ability to identify effective teaching strategies, Georgia educators need to apply them to the state's most vulnerable students.

# Incarceration in the US and Georgia



## Key Findings / Social Justice

### The Overflowing Prison System

The U.S. has one of the highest incarceration rates per capita in the world and competes with China for the most people incarcerated, despite the fact that China has over one billion more people than the US. And the U.S. also is the leader in the prison population rate.<sup>1</sup> America’s approach to citizens who are accused and convicted of a crime too often lacks a public safety rationale, disproportionately affects minorities, and inflicts overly harsh sentences.

The Founders sought to establish a justice system free of government abuse. Four of the first amendments to the Constitution protect the rights of the accused or convicted. But over the decades, the application of justice has not lived up to that ideal. Today, the incarceration rate in the United States is nine times higher than Germany, eight times higher than Italy, five times higher than the U.K., and 15 times higher than Japan.<sup>2</sup>

The State of Georgia’s rate of incarceration triples and quadruples the rate of other countries. Further, according to the Georgia Justice Project, “Georgia has the highest rate of correctional control in the U.S. – with 1 in every 18 Georgians on probation or parole. Because Georgia does not cap probation, sentences are three times longer than all other states, which results in 10+ year sentences for over 40% of Georgians on probation.”<sup>3</sup>

Other countries do not use prison as the lone approach to solving crime. In 2016, the Brennan Center examined convictions and sentences for the 1.46 million people behind bars nationally and found that fully 39 percent,<sup>4</sup> or 576,000, were in prison without any public safety reason and could have been punished in a less costly and damaging way (such as community service).

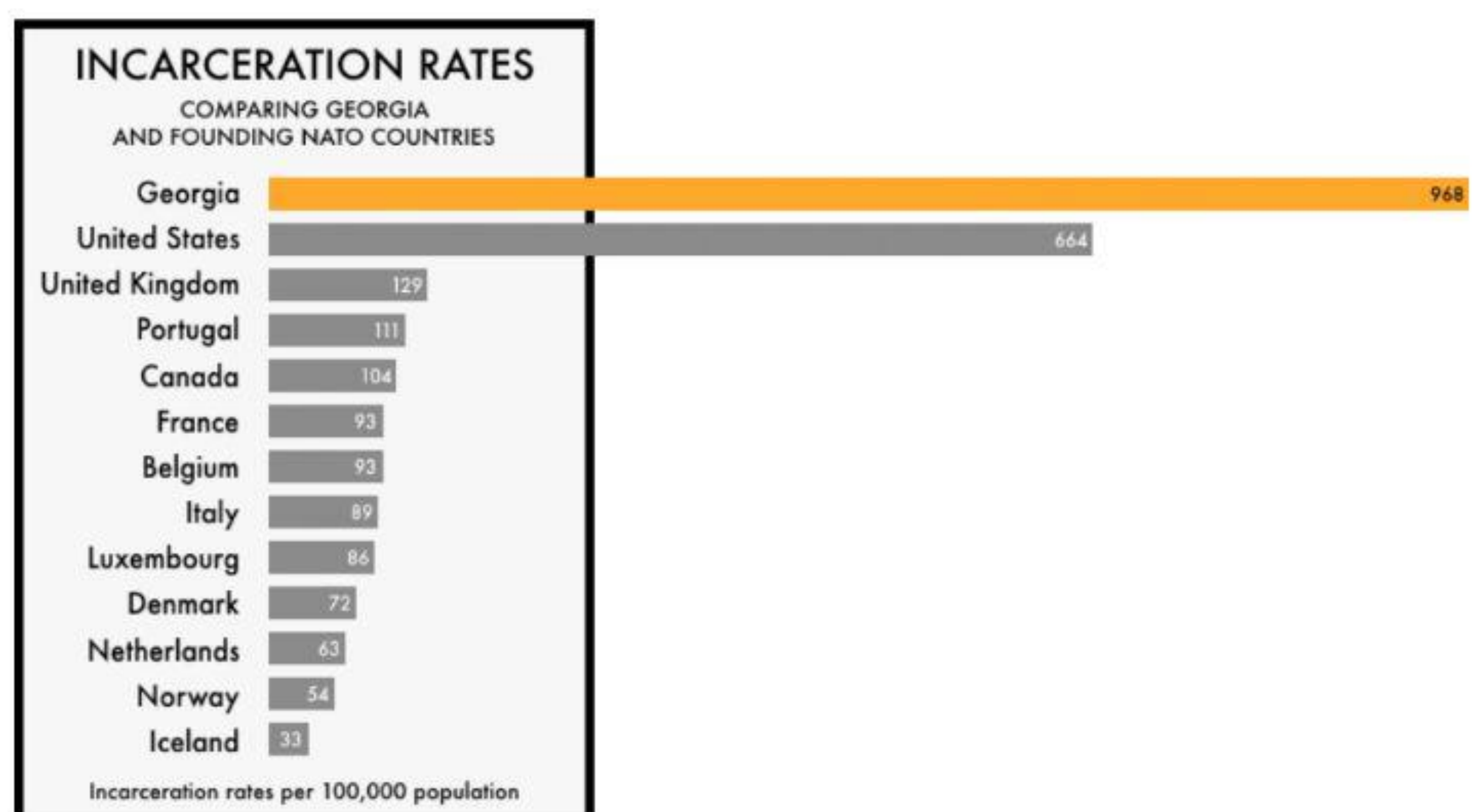


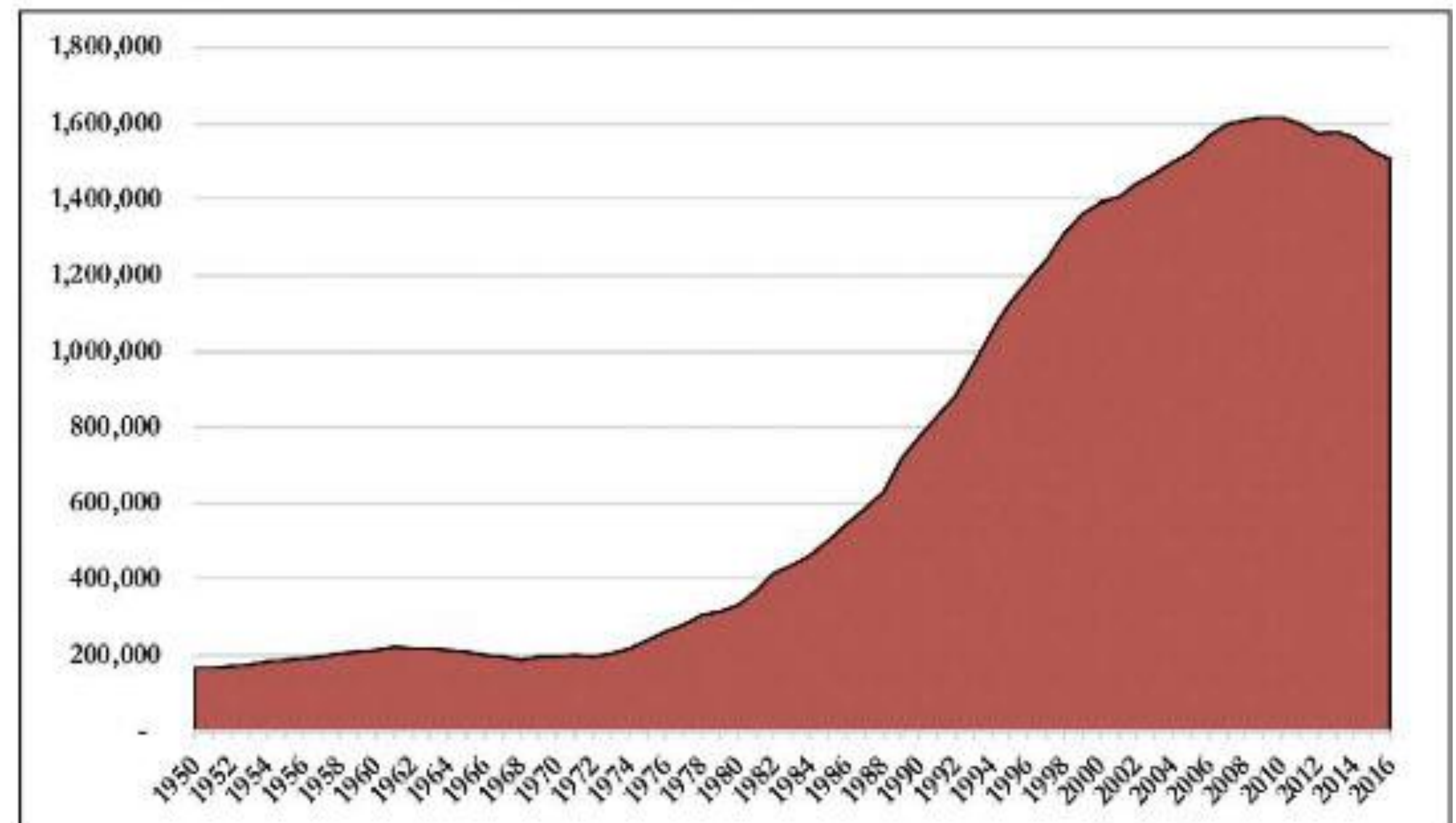
Figure 1 Incarceration Rates in Georgia vs. other counties (2021)<sup>4</sup>

But even if those incarcerated without a public safety risk were all released, the U.S. would still incarcerate at a far higher rate than comparable countries.<sup>5</sup>

For four decades the U.S. prison system growth has increased exponentially.

An estimated 70 million to 100 million Americans – roughly 1 in 3 U.S. adults – have an incarceration, conviction, or arrest record, which is a direct consequence of decades of mass incarceration and overcriminalization.<sup>6</sup>

Prison System Growth (1950-2016)



## Georgia's Legacy Colored by Black Codes

The State of Georgia's justice system took root with the use of a draconian system of race-based laws and practices called the Georgia Black Codes. According to writer Alex Camardelle, in his 2020 blog, [Telling the Unvarnished Truth About Georgia](#),<sup>7</sup> noted African American 19th and 20th century historian and author W. E. B. Du Bois debuted *The Georgia Negro* 120 years ago at the Paris World Exhibition. "The project featured a variety of hand-drawn data visualizations that displayed the economic reality of Black life in Georgia during Reconstruction."<sup>8</sup> Du Bois also brought hand-transcribed records of [Georgia's Black Codes](#),<sup>9</sup> the laws affecting Black Georgians, to accompany the data. Du Bois displayed the codes at the exhibit to show that we cannot explain the outcomes without an understanding of how the law was used to create hardship for Black Georgians.

"The [Black Codes were passed by the Georgia General Assembly](#) immediately after emancipation to codify the subordinate treatment of formerly-enslaved Black Georgians and maintain a pool of cheap Black labor. For far more than 100 years to follow, Georgia lawmakers implemented, upheld, and expanded egregious laws that blocked civic and economic opportunity and relegated Black Georgians to the lowest rungs of the economic ladder."<sup>10</sup>

## The Criminal Legal System in Georgia and Mass Incarceration

"Fast forward through nearly a century of racial terrorism, Jim Crow laws, and the current era of mass incarceration, Black Georgians have made progress "in spite of the machinery of white supremacist culture, politics and the law that surrounded them." However, even with the Black Codes no longer the "official" policy of Georgia, the impact of those laws continues to be felt across the state." (Camardelle, Alex. "Telling the Unvarnished Truth about Georgia." Georgia Budget and Policy Institute, 26 Feb. 2020. <https://gbpi.org/telling-the-unvarnished-truth-about-georgia/>)

According to the Prison Policy Initiative, Georgia incarcerates more individuals per capita than any other democracy on the planet. Further, Black residents make up a disproportionate percentage of the state's incarcerated population.

According to the "State Incarceration Trends: Georgia" (2021) conducted by the Vera Institute of Justice, Georgia has one of the highest rates of incarceration in the United States, and Black people are overrepresented in the state's prison population. The report<sup>12</sup> also highlights efforts by policymakers, advocates, and community members to reduce the state's prison population and address disparities in the criminal legal system.

Georgia's prison population by race, according to the Vera Institute report "State Incarceration Trends: Georgia" (2021) was as follows<sup>13</sup>:

Ethnicity/Race	2021 % of Incarcerated Population in GA	2021 Population in GA(*)
Black	61.7%	30.41%
White	30.8%	50.23%
Hispanic	6.3%	10.03%
Other	1.2%	9.33%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

The state has 4.3 million Georgians with a criminal record according to the Georgia Justice Project.<sup>14</sup> The Georgia Department of Corrections has 34 state prisons across the state, which house nearly 47,000 felony offenders.

These are not mere statistics. Inequities in the justice system disrupt and destroy Black families and can reverberate across Black communities for generations. A criminal record creates barriers to civic engagement when felony convictions prevent individuals from serving on a jury, and limit workforce opportunities for returning citizens who have challenges obtaining meaningful employment due to background checks.

According to the Georgia Justice Project, "Unemployment, poverty and crime are inextricably linked.<sup>14</sup> Over 90% of those involved in the criminal justice system fall below the federal poverty line.<sup>15</sup> Though poverty might have been one of the underlying factors for a person's arrest, the criminal justice system too often becomes a force keeping folks in poverty.<sup>16</sup> For instance, a criminal record in Georgia is a major impediment to getting a job or keeping/obtaining public housing. Employment and housing are two foundational elements of economic stability. Both can be denied people who want to create stability after a criminal conviction, thereby keeping them in poverty and vulnerable to re-offending."<sup>17</sup>

The US Department of Health and Human Services, Incarceration section of the Healthy People Report 2030 states, "Higher rates of incarceration are often seen among certain racial and ethnic groups, particularly Black and Hispanic populations, and people with lower levels of education. Black and Hispanic people are disproportionately arrested and convicted of offenses. One study found that the imprisonment rate for Black adults was nearly six times the imprisonment rate for White adults and nearly double the rate for Hispanic adults. One cost of incarceration is low or no economic mobility."<sup>18</sup>

The Federal Bureau of Prisons, as of January 2023, reports 38.4% of the federal prison population is Black and 93% of them are men. However, Black people represent 13% of the nation's population.<sup>19</sup> U.S. Census Bureau figures show that 18.4 million U.S. children, 1 in 4, live without a biological, step, or adoptive father in the home and that 74.3 percent of all White children below the age of 18 live with both parents, while only 38.7 percent of Black minors do. Fatherless households can weaken the Black family and push more children and families further into crisis and poverty.

Past and current policies continue to stifle progress in Georgia and reinforce economic disadvantage. Explicitly racist terms are no longer enshrined in law, but so-called "colorblind" policies and talking points about Georgia's economy today continue to inflict damage by pretending as if the Black Codes were never the law of the land.<sup>20</sup>

The reality is that many of Georgia's systems remain inspired by the Black Codes. For example, compared to the general population, the Criminal Justice System in Georgia disproportionately incarcerates Blacks. According to the Georgia Department of Corrections, of the 14,818 inmates admitted to Georgia state prisons in 2022,<sup>21</sup> 50.8% were Black, yet Black Georgians make up 32% of the State's population.



## ***Criminal Legal System Reform***

The prison reform movement occurred in the late 19th and early 20th century in the U.S.<sup>22</sup> In recent decades, the call for action has begun to resonate. By 2012 the demand for criminal justice reform reached a feverish pitch on the heels of publications like Michelle Alexander's bestselling book, *The New Jim Crow*. Academics, activists, and faith leaders demanded that policymakers rethink their approach to crime and punishment. Fortuitously, around the same time, states were hard hit by the spiraling costs of operating prison facilities.

For the first time, conservative lawmakers entertained the idea of criminal justice reform. They needed to reduce prison spending. This fiscal priority led states like Georgia to make changes. Under Gov. Nathan Deal, Georgia started by changing sentencing guidelines and introducing programs to promote successful re-entry of returning citizens. The new approach was consistent with a new concept called "Smart on Crime."

In 2013, the Georgia General Assembly created the Georgia Council on Criminal Justice Reform. Since that time legislators have rewritten sections of the criminal codes to align with strategies advanced by non-partisan think tanks like the Pew Research Center.

Cash money bail systems are contributing to the mass incarceration of low-income citizens accused of crimes disproportionately. If you are poor, you are more likely to remain in jail for misdemeanors and non-violent crimes, most often resulting in lost employment and homelessness. According to the Cornell Journal of Law and Policy's recent study, *Socioeconomic Status, and its Implication on Criminal Justice: Bail Reform*, "Cash bail practices frequently affect Black and Latino men disproportionately." Further, "The disproportionate effect is also seen between various socioeconomic statuses; those without the means to afford bail face incarceration while their wealthier counterparts may await trial while in their communities."<sup>23</sup>

While there is a gradual change in approach among once hard-on-crime proponents, elected officials and thought leaders need to do much more. They need to address the egregious flaws in Georgia's penal system that allow for daily violence and horrific deaths to take place in their prison facilities. Unsafe conditions and gang violence in Georgia's prisons have reached a level of atrocity found in some of the world's most notorious dictatorships.

## ***Factors that Influence Incarceration Rates***

Over the years, research scientists have conducted studies to identify the root causes of an increased incarceration rate. A policy brief published by the State of Georgia in 2008, identified the factors as:

- The number of offenders convicted and committed to prison terms.
- The length of time they serve in prison.
- The rate of released prisoners who re-offend and are sent back to prison.

However, the Georgia study only considers factors after citizens have been convicted of crimes. More recently, Eric Fleegler, MD, MPH, associate professor of pediatrics and emergency medicine at Harvard Medical School and emergency medicine physician at Boston Children's Hospital, has gone deeper to identify the root cause factors of crime, and he contends they are "severe economic distress, an erupting mental health crisis, and a significant uptick in the sale of firearms."<sup>24</sup>

Equally important, studies show a deep relationship between incarceration and low literacy.<sup>20</sup>

- High school dropouts are 3.5 times more likely than high school graduates to be arrested in their lifetime.
- High school dropouts are 63% more likely to be incarcerated than their peers with four-year college degrees.

***Georgia Gun Laws do not support the reduction of gun violence.*** In 2022, Georgia enacted "permitless carry" legislation<sup>25</sup> that repealed longstanding protections that required people to obtain a license (called a "weapons carry license"), pursuant to a fingerprint background check, to be eligible to carry concealed loaded firearms in public spaces in Georgia. Effective April 12, 2022, the new law generally permits any "lawful weapons carrier" to carry handguns openly or concealed in most public spaces without any background check or permit.<sup>26</sup>



### *Gun Violence and the Black Community in Georgia*

Gun violence in Georgia's Black communities is alarming and out of control. The online database, Everystat.org reports the following:

- **Gun Deaths by Intent:** 55% of gun deaths in Georgia are by firearm suicide, an average of 932 deaths per year.
- **Gun Deaths Over Time in Georgia:** The rate of gun deaths has increased 41% from 2011 to 2020 in Georgia, compared to a 33% increase nationwide. This means that in 2020 there were 665 more-gun deaths than in 2011.
- In Georgia, the rate of gun suicide increased 13% and gun homicide increased 92% from 2011 to 2020, compared to a 12% increase and 70% increase nationwide, respectively.

### *Cost of Crime to Georgia*

Gun violence costs Georgia \$23.9 billion each year, of which \$597.8 million is paid by taxpayers.

Georgia has the 15th-highest societal cost of gun violence in the US at \$2,249 per resident each year.

Georgia has the 10th highest rate of gun violence - an average year, 1,693 people die and 4,321 are wounded by guns in Georgia.

Georgia has a high rate of homicides and assaults every year. An average of 730 people in Georgia die by gun homicides and 1,593 are wounded by gun assaults—a rate of 7.1 homicides and 15.0 assaults per 100,000 people. Georgia has the eighth-highest rate of gun homicides and gun assaults in the US. In Georgia, 81% of all homicides involve a gun, compared to 76% nationwide.

### *Children and Teens Gun Deaths*

Guns are the leading cause of death among children and teens in Georgia. An average of 161 children and teens die by guns every year, of which 31% of these deaths are suicides and 63% are homicides. In the U.S., 35% of all gun deaths among children and teens are suicides and 60% are homicides.

### *Shootings of Unarmed Black Citizens*

An alarming number of killings by law enforcement and citizens with too many of the cases not resulting in charges or convictions of the officers and citizens involved, continues to be a critical issue that reflects a disturbing pattern in law enforcement and race relations across the U.S. The rate of fatal police shootings of unarmed Black people during the period 2015-2019 in the US, was more than 3 times as high as it was among White people, according to research published online in the Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health.<sup>23</sup>

Georgia's most high-profile cases of shootings of unarmed citizens include Ahmaud Arbery in Brunswick, Georgia, and Rayshard Brooks in Atlanta. While there were convictions in the Arbery case, the charges against officers in the Brooks case were dropped.

These cases and so many others that have sparked the Black Lives Matter Movement clearly demonstrate the need for substantive reforms in police training in de-escalation tactics, cultural bias and community policing effort.

### *Making Georgia's Jails and Prisons Safe*

The U.S. Department of Justice is investigating Georgia's Department of Corrections. They are looking at allegations of chronic understaffing in state prisons, meaning neither the incarcerated nor corrections officers are safe from violence, including self-inflicted harm.

As an example of understaffing, Georgia State Prison has a staff vacancy rate of 70%.<sup>27</sup> Seven out of 10 officers are not coming to work there.<sup>28</sup>

According to state data, the number of corrections officers working across the entire Department of Corrections has dropped by over 35% in the last decade. Meanwhile, the state prison population has barely changed.

Gangs and prisons have long been intertwined, but they have become more connected in recent years as technology makes it faster and easier to transfer information. Inmate gang leaders in Georgia are often found to be directing crime on the streets, including drug trafficking and, in several cases, murders.<sup>29</sup>

The Department of Corrections estimates that it houses 15,000 gang members. The prison system has 52,000 inmates in total. In the last five years, authorities say, the gang members have been responsible for 1,700 assaults in Georgia prisons.<sup>30</sup>

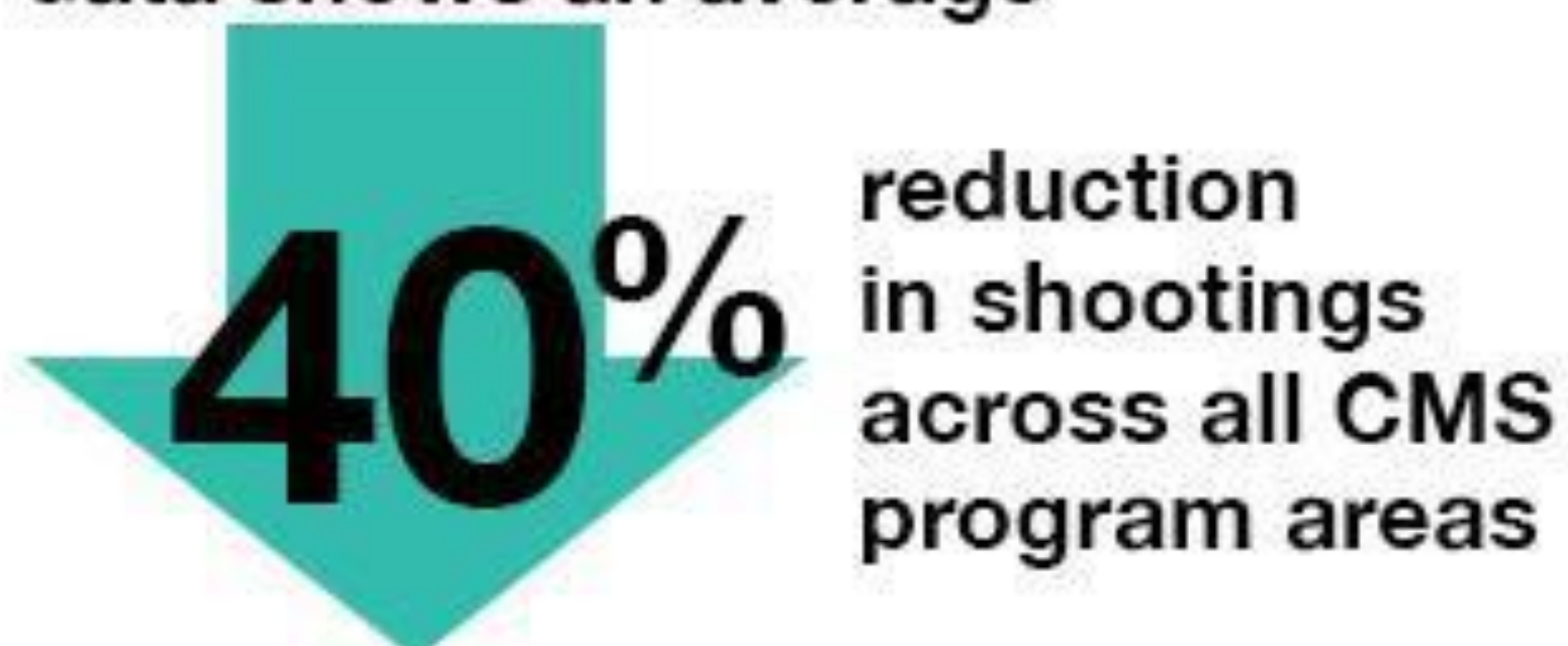
In the next iteration of criminal and social justice reform laws, policymakers need to make prison safety a priority.

### *New Approaches to Stemming Violent Crime Show Positive Impact*

We will not see significant improvement in our criminal legal system if Georgia and our nation continue to focus only on “being tougher on crime” by increasing sentences and punishments alone, and not focusing on new and innovative ways of shifting the police culture back to a “protect and serve” mindset. Numerous studies have shown that the punitive approach alone does not significantly decrease crime; rather, it serves to boost mass incarceration and further harms our most vulnerable citizens - who are disproportionately Black.

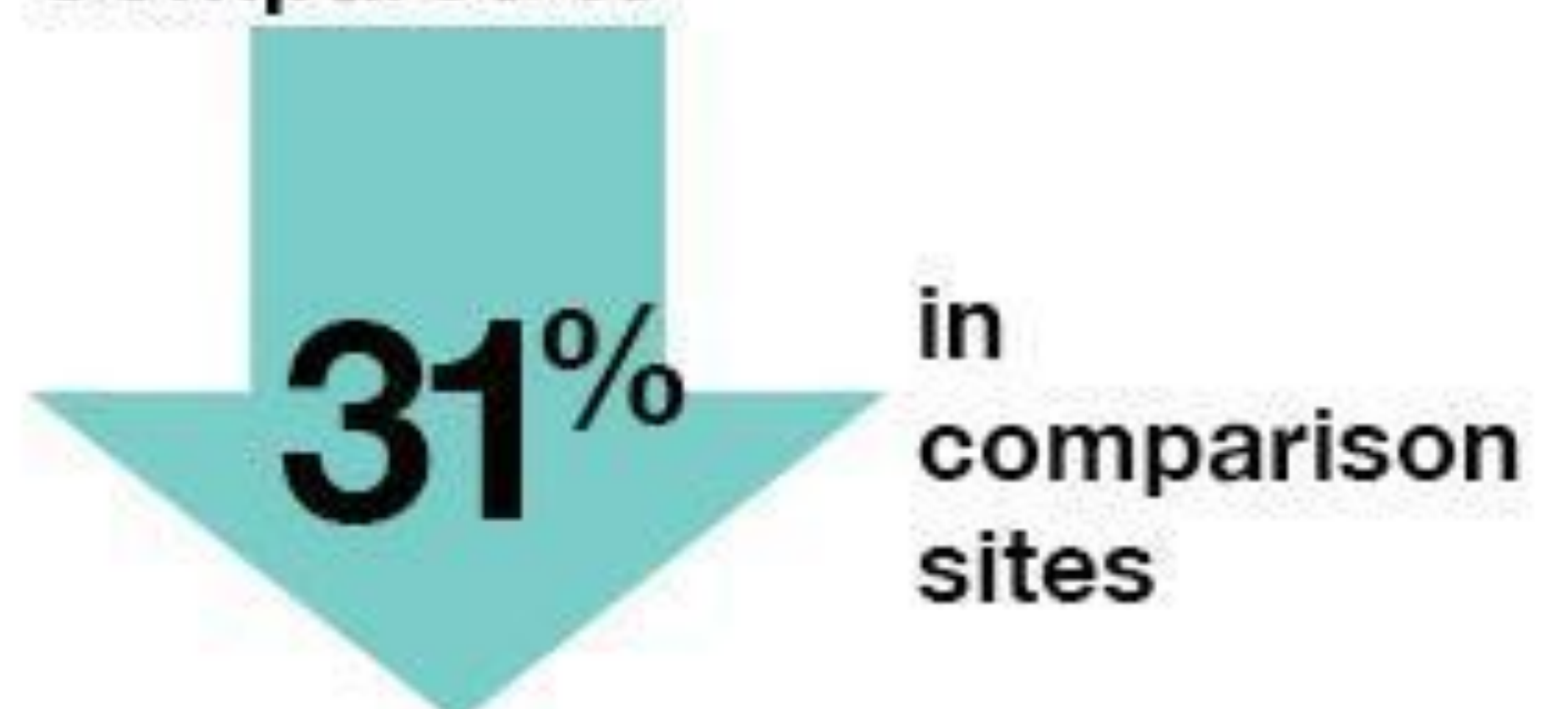
The City of New York has seen progress in reducing violent crime through the development of its Crisis Management System (CMS). The CMS is operated in partnership with a network of non-profit providers in 21 precincts that deploys teams of credible messengers who mediate conflicts on the street and connect high-risk individuals to services that can reduce the long-term risk of violence. From 2010 to 2019, data show the Crisis Management System has contributed to an average 40% reduction in shootings across program areas compared to a 31% decline in shootings in the 17 highest violence precincts in New York City.<sup>31</sup>

**From 2010 to 2019,  
data shows an average**



Source: <https://www.nyc.gov/site/peacenyc/interventions/crisis-management.page>

**Compared to**



Finally, the majority of crimes are “economically motivated,” which is a direct result of inadequate investments in public education, community and economic development in Black communities, capital for small businesses, rehabilitation and workforce development that prepares more citizens for livable wage career pathways and jobs. Absent change, the nation’s criminal legal systems will continue to decline, drive crime even higher, and result in more lives destroyed and more deaths.

# Healthcare for Black Georgians

## Key Findings / Health

### INTRODUCTION

Georgia was ranked as the ninth worst state in the U.S. for overall health care in 2022, according to Wallethub's 2022 Best & Worst States for Health Care ranking. To determine the best and worst states for healthcare, investigators looked at three dimensions: cost, access, and outcomes.<sup>1</sup>

Georgia ranked number 28 for cost, number 41 for access, and number 43 for outcomes. Access to care includes rates of physicians, dentists, nurse practitioners, and physician assistants per population. Another access measure used is the rate of people without any health coverage. Georgia has the third-highest rate of uninsured, at 13.4 percent, trailing only Texas and Oklahoma.<sup>2</sup>

Among the key metrics contained in the state-by-state rankings, Georgia finished:

- 16th - percent of medical residents retained.
- 42nd - hospital beds per capita.
- 42nd - physicians per capita.
- 42nd - percent of adults with no dental visit in the past year.
- 45th - percent of insured children.
- 45th - percent of residents age 12+ who are fully vaccinated.
- 47th - percent of insured adults.
- 48th - dentists per capita.

Source: Wallethub's 2022 Best & Worst States for Health Care

While Georgians have “one of the highest rates in the country for those without health insurance, at the same time the state has some of the worst health outcomes.”<sup>3</sup> In health outcomes, the state was 47th. The category includes data on infant and maternal mortality, where Georgia has long had problems.

Dr. Harry Heiman, a health policy expert at Georgia State University, said of the WalletHub ranking, “We know Georgia has unacceptably high infant mortality and maternal mortality and high levels of diabetes, stroke, and heart disease.” He goes on to say, “there are significant inequities for all of these problems, disproportionately affecting low-income, rural, and Black and brown communities in our state.”

To rank each state, investigators evaluated cost, access and outcomes of healthcare using 42 relevant metrics, with each metric graded on a 100-point scale, with a score of 100 representing the best healthcare at the most reasonable cost.

If the state of healthcare for all Georgians is anemic, then healthcare for Black Georgians is on life support. APD Census data show that 32% of Black people across six cities in Georgia do not have health insurance. The racial disparities of other chronic conditions are equally alarming.

APD data show a range of chronic conditions affecting Black Georgians.

MSA	Mortality Indicators (2021)				
	Asthma	Cancer	Diabetes	Drowning	Heart Disease
Albany	67%	42%	72%	100%	51%
Atlanta	49%	32%	48%	44%	34%
Augusta	0%	38%	51%	33%	41%
Columbus	80%	38%	62%	67%	46%
Macon	33%	35%	44%	50%	43%
Savannah	33%	31%	55%	100%	38%

Source: Georgia Department of Public Health (GDPH OASIS) 2021

Megan Douglas, a professor at Morehouse School of Medicine, says Black Georgians specifically have higher rates of chronic illnesses like diabetes, asthma, and cancer rates. According to Douglas and other experts, social determinants of health - the conditions under which people are born, raised, live, work, and grow old -- include economic status, housing and access to quality affordable housing, and availability of health care and social support networks.

## SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH AND BLACKS IN GA

According to findings by the Kaiser Family Foundation,<sup>4</sup> “Provisional data from 2020 show that overall life expectancy across all racial/ethnic groups was 77.3 years ... Life expectancy for Black people was only 71.8 years compared to 77.6 years for White people and 78.8 years for Hispanic people. Life expectancy was even lower for Black males at only 68 years.”

The Centers for Disease Control reports that there was some good news for Black Americans. “Overall, their life expectancy improved over time, and Black men showed the biggest relative gain in years. Despite that, though, Black Americans still had the lowest life expectancy in nearly all states by 2019.”<sup>5</sup>

Where we live, work, and play affects our health.

Social determinants of health have a major impact on Black Georgians’ well-being, and quality of life. Additional examples of social determinants of health include:

- Housing, transportation, and neighborhoods.
- Racism, discrimination, and violence.
- Language and literacy skills.
- Education, job opportunities, and income.
- Access to nutritious foods and physical activity.
- Air and water quality.
- Access to water safety education.

### Blacks Disproportionately Affected by Chronic and Life-Threatening Diseases

Black communities that have unfavorable conditions, such as a lack of access to nutritious foods and affordable healthcare providers, are less likely to have good nutrition. That raises their risk of health conditions like heart disease, diabetes, cancer, kidney disease, and obesity — and even lowers life expectancy for people who do have access to healthy foods.<sup>6</sup>

Public and private sector officials often do not understand how to engage members of majority Black communities in navigating through their social and physical environments to maintain healthy habits. For example, in some instances, advancing healthy habits requires little more than a focused messaging like the American Heart Association’s stroke prevention campaign. The criticality of swimming and water safety is another example of an issue area that can be addressed with community messaging.<sup>7</sup>

Focusing on the social determinants, Black Georgians and their community partners can advance the health and quality of life of Black and other low-income and rural Georgians and make equity more than a cliché.

Another area often overlooked is the digital divide. Digital health tools provide primary care clinicians with opportunities to address the social determinants of health. However, many Black Georgians lack access to the internet and needed technology at home.

There is a clear need to create social, physical, and economic environments that promote the full potential for health and well-being.

## COVID IMPACT ON BLACK GEORGIANS

The Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic disproportionately burdens communities of color in the United States. According to a 2022 article from the NIH National Library of Medicine, “In the early part of the pandemic, many counties in Georgia led the nation in cases and deaths, and Albany, Georgia, had the second highest COVID-19 death rate in the country for a metropolitan area behind New York City.” Morehouse School of Medicine researchers found that COVID-19 cases are higher in Georgia counties where more African Americans live, even after stripping out factors like poverty, health insurance and population density.<sup>8</sup>

These studies support the assertion that the pandemic places a greater burden on Black Georgians. Results from the study are consistent with the literature, with three outcomes - case rate, case hospitalization rate, and mortality rate - significantly associated with the Index of Concentration at the Extremes (ICE) measure and additional predictors after controlling for the prevalence of preexisting conditions (diabetes, obesity and smoking) and potential barriers to care.<sup>9</sup>

The report findings showed that counties in Georgia with the most polarization experienced greater coronavirus morbidity and mortality, suggesting that structural interventions administered at the county level may be needed to address health inequities during emerging infectious disease outbreaks. Overall, these findings support the assertion of the weak income theory (inequality hypothesis), which states that unequal distribution of resources and privilege contributes to poor health outcomes.

2021 COVID-19 Mortality					
MSA	Black Count	Black Percentage	White Count	White Percentage	Total Count
Albany	134	53%	119	47%	254
Atlanta	2333	35%	4073	62%	6609
Augusta	291	43%	368	55%	672
Columbus	218	44%	275	55%	500
Macon	214	42%	291	57%	511
Savannah	225	38%	359	61%	589

## ACCESS TO HEALTH INSURANCE AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Access to quality, affordable healthcare is essential for a community to grow, thrive, and address historic disparities. Furthermore, lack of access to healthcare can shorten life expectancy and lead to a decrease in quality of life. In order to create equitable and quality healthcare access in the state of Georgia, communities need adequate public funding. In Georgia, the decision to not fully embrace Medicaid expansion has left hundreds of thousands of residents uninsured, resulting in limited access for those with low incomes to obtain full and preventative care.

Starting in 2014, states had the option to increase the income threshold for Medicaid to include more adults who make below or near the poverty line.<sup>10</sup> However, Georgia has not expanded Medicaid to these levels, so adults between ages 19 and 64 without dependent children cannot get Medicaid coverage, and adults with dependents need to make below about \$7,000 a year for a family of three.<sup>11</sup>

According to the Cover Georgia coalition, in 2020, “1.4 million Georgians do not have health insurance, and Georgia’s uninsured rate of 13.7 percent is third highest in the country. In rural Georgia, the uninsured rate could climb to more than 25 percent by 2026.” The organization found that “closing the coverage gap would help address racial disparities in health care access and outcomes. About 36 percent of Georgians in the coverage gap are Black, and 22 percent are Latinx.”<sup>12</sup>

As the state continues its response to the COVID-19 pandemic and prepares for future public health events, the immediate adoption of the Medicaid expansion would allow the state to bring in more federal money to spend on healthcare services and ensure more Georgians can afford to get care for COVID-19 and underlying health conditions that could put them at higher risk.

MSA	Insurance Coverage non-Institutionalized Black Population (2020)	
	Have Health Insurance	No Health Insurance
Albany	53%	58%
Atlanta	34%	35%
Augusta	35%	37%
Columbus	42%	49%
Macon	44%	49%
Savannah	33%	37%
Georgia	31%	32%

### Infrastructure

Hospital closures affect everyone in the state, but closures hit Black communities harder because residents often lack transportation or proper insurance to be served at remaining facilities without incurring crippling debt. In rural and urban areas, when hospitals or clinics close, patient access to care can be hours away with no public transportation available to reach medical attention.

For example, the recent closing of the Atlanta Medical Center, which was one of only two Level I trauma centers in the city, had ripple effects throughout the metro area. The closure<sup>13</sup> put an additional burden on the metro area’s only other Level I trauma center, Grady Hospital. Hospital closures have an even more outsized impact on rural communities. The Kaiser Family Foundation reports that in the past 10 years, eight rural hospitals have shut down in Georgia, putting Georgia in the top three states when it comes to rural hospital closures in the nation.

The closure of these hospitals directly corresponds with longer wait times and could mean the difference between life or death. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is now more important than ever to create the medical infrastructure that serves the needs of all Georgians, with an emphasis on ensuring access for people with low incomes and providing affordable insurance options for them.

During our community conversations held during the summer of 2022, residents across the state noted hospital closures, distrust of the medical system, and general challenges with accessibility as issues for Black Georgians. In order for the state to move forward socially and economically, it is important that communities have access to essential medical infrastructure.

Establishing robust and affordable infrastructure leads to a broader adoption of preventative care, which is one of the most important ways to close medical outcome gaps. Preventive care allows for medical professionals to catch disease early and address the potential of future disease.

Georgia needs more public-private partnerships to create a medical system throughout the state that is adequately funded, provides specialized services to marginalized communities, and supports preventive care to ensure the Black community - and all communities - have equitable treatment in a sector area that literally determines life or death for people seeking wellness.

## Proximity - Impact on Urban and Rural Georgia

Proximity to healthcare services presents a dilemma for Blacks living in rural communities. They are deeply entrenched in the conditions that earn them the recognition of living in a disparity belt often described as medical deserts, where access to affordable, quality healthcare is severely compromised.

In 2020, the organization Georgians for a Healthy Future advocated for the expansion of Medicaid to help rural Georgians. “Rural Georgians experience health disparities on multiple dimensions: they are less likely to have job-based health insurance, may have to travel long distances to seek medical care, and experience higher rates of chronic health conditions than their suburban and urban counterparts.”<sup>14</sup>

A major concern is the closures of hospitals and medical clinics in rural areas that not only serve a widespread clientele but often are a major source of employment for residents in the area. Georgians for a Healthy Future called for closing the coverage gap to “strengthen Georgia’s rural health system and increase access to care.” To have full healthcare access, rural residents must have:

- Financial means to pay for services, such as health or dental insurance that is accepted by the provider.
- Means to reach and use services, such as transportation to services that may be located at a distance, and the ability to take paid time off of work to use such services.
- Trust that they can use services without compromising privacy.
- Confidence that they will receive quality care.<sup>15</sup>

*Source: <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/topics/healthcare-access>*

Seven rural Georgia hospitals have shuttered since 2013 across the state, and more than half of Georgia’s remaining rural hospitals are financially vulnerable to closure.<sup>16</sup>

Many Georgia hospitals are struggling because they treat so many patients who lack health insurance and cannot afford high out-of-pocket costs. Additionally, trust is an issue too often overlooked. For example, rural Black women in Georgia experience racial discrimination and distrust of the medical field. This compounds barriers to preventing and treating cervical cancer.<sup>17</sup>

## Mental Health

Black Georgian Americans disproportionately face risk factors linked to mental illness, including poverty,<sup>18</sup> homelessness, and violence, as well as significant challenges in their attempts to obtain adequate mental health care. American Psychological Association. African Americans have limited access to mental and behavioral health care. According to the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD), Black Americans experience serious mental health issues 20% more often than white Americans. (The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health.<sup>19</sup>

Access to mental healthcare is harder for Black Georgians.

- They are 10 percent more likely to report serious psychological distress than white American adults.
- Barriers to accessing mental healthcare exist disproportionately.
- Due to unmet needs and other barriers, those living with serious mental health conditions likely aren’t aware of or able to access the treatment they need.
- Many instances of fatal encounters with police have been attributed to mental health episodes of victims.

## HEALTH DISPARITIES

### MATERNAL MORTALITY

One of the most pressing issues in healthcare for Black people is the Black maternal mortality rate - which cuts across income levels. In a 2021 study published in the National Institute of Health, the State of Georgia “tops the list of all 50 states with the highest maternal mortality rate of 46.2 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births for all women, and a maternal mortality rate of 66.6 deaths per 100,000 live births for African American women.” These high rates of Black maternal mortality cry out for answers and reform so that pregnancy will no longer mean a risk of death for so many Black mothers and their babies.

Births			Albany	Atlanta	Augusta	Columbus	Macon	Savannah	State of Georgia
Indicators	Source	Year	Percent Black	Percent Black	Percent Black	Percent Black	Percent Black	Percent Black	Percent Black
Low Weight Births	GDPH OASIS	2020	78%	56%	59%	64%	72%	58%	53%
Premature Births	GDPH OASIS	2020	71%	49%	54%	56%	62%	51%	46%
Births with No Prenatal Care	GDPH OASIS	2020	73%	52%	63%	65%	67%	55%	47%
Births with Prenatal Care	GDPH OASIS	2020	82%	54%	63%	68%	70%	56%	49%

Deaths (Fetal/Infant)			Albany	Atlanta	Augusta	Columbus	Macon	Savannah	State of Georgia
Indicators	Source	Year	Percent Black	Percent Black	Percent Black	Percent Black	Percent Black	Percent Black	Percent Black
Fetal Deaths	GDPH OASIS	2020	68%	57%	60%	72%	68%	56%	53%
Infant Deaths	GDPH OASIS	2020	80%	59%	79%	69%	76%	62%	54%
Death from Drug Overdose	GDPH OASIS	2020	55%	30%	40%	22%	22%	29%	25%

### AIDS

Scientific strides in HIV treatment and prevention have reduced transmissions and HIV-related deaths significantly in the United States in the past two decades. However, despite coordinated national efforts to implement HIV services, the epidemic persists, especially in the South. It also disproportionately impacts marginalized groups, such as Black/African American and Latinx communities, women, people who use drugs, men who have sex with men, and other sexual and gender minorities.

<https://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/end-hiv-epidemic-we-must-address-health-disparities>

### PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Participation in regular physical activity is critical to sustaining good health and to reduce the risk of developing or dying from heart disease, diabetes, colon cancer, and high blood pressure. Yet less than half of Georgia’s adults get 150 minutes a week of moderate intensity aerobic activity and in recent surveys, only half of Georgia’s high school students reported being physically active for at least 60 minutes a day.<sup>20</sup>

Black Georgians clearly face health disparities that are directly impacting mortality and quality of life. More access to health insurance coverage through the expansion of Medicaid and more investments in infrastructure to improve access to quality care, more focus on physical and nutrition, and health education are required to positively impact Black Georgians’ lives.



# The Black Vote in Georgia

## ① Key Findings / Civic Engagement

### The Black Vote in Georgia

Although many enslaved people resisted captivity throughout the centuries of enslavement in the United States, the historic and brutal pathway to freedom and voting rights for Black people in the south, including Georgians, escalated with the end of the Civil War, the Emancipation Proclamation, and the Reconstruction Plan of Congress that passed the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments to the US Constitution.<sup>1</sup> These amendments were designed to guarantee formerly enslaved Black people their freedom (13th Amendment - 1865), citizenship (14th Amendment - 1868), and to grant Black men the right to vote as only White men held at the time (15th Amendment - 1870).<sup>2</sup>

According to the National Archives Milestone Documents, “Another equally important provision was the statement “nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.”<sup>3</sup> The right to due process of law and equal protection of the law now applied to both the federal and state governments.<sup>4</sup>

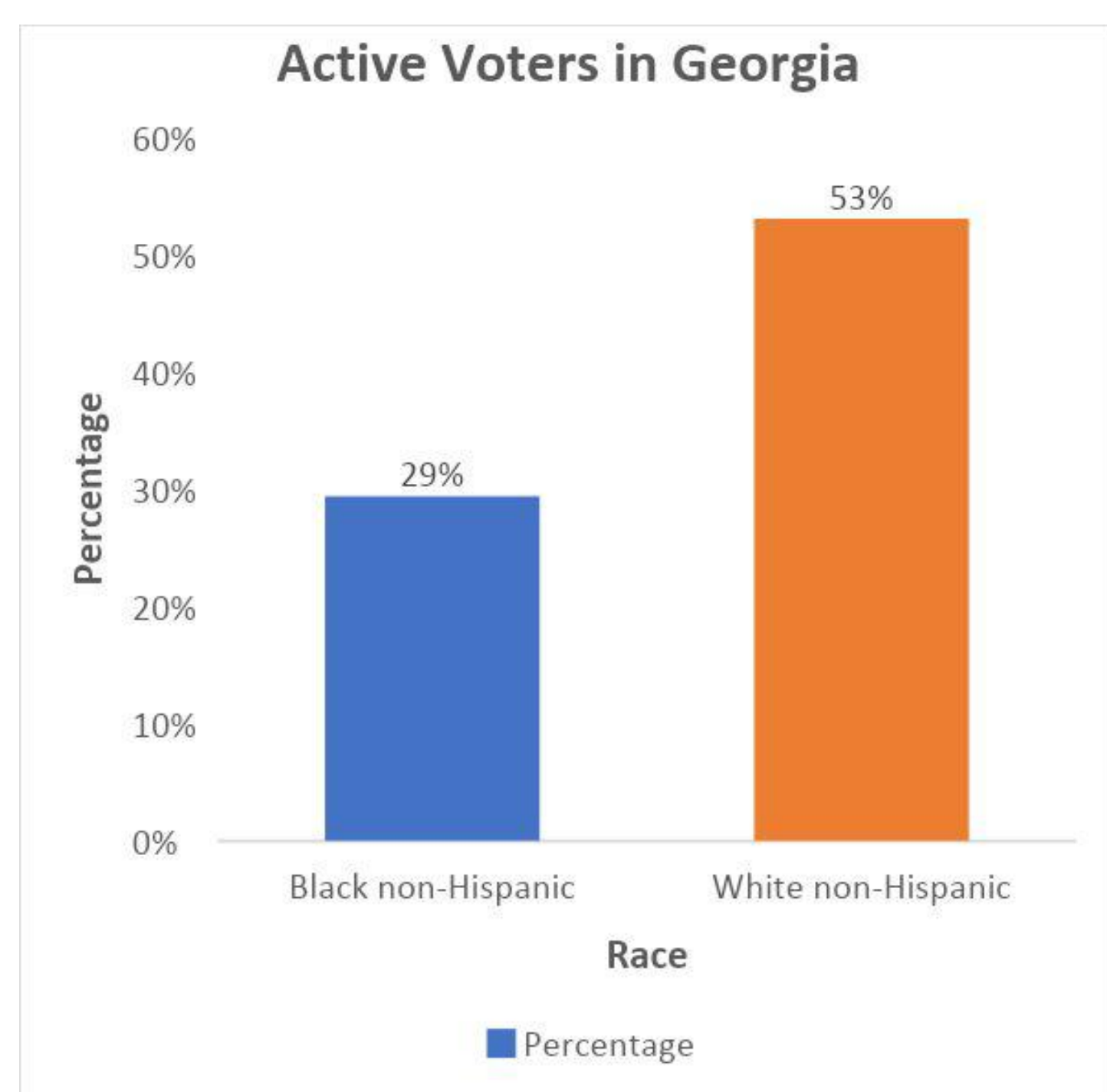
After the passage of these three pieces of historic legislation and the Voting Rights Act of 1866, Congress implemented a plan of Reconstruction from 1866-1877 designed to support southern states through a process of transition toward a system where Black and White citizens would learn to co-exist having equal access and equal opportunity as defined in the laws.<sup>5</sup> And during Reconstruction, all across the south, Blacks started exercising their right to vote, held elected office, acquired land, built businesses, and progress was made through the 1880s.<sup>6</sup>

However, in the 1890s actions were taken by those in the southern states that did not support Black progress, and voter suppression tactics began. That faction drove the passage of laws to limit access to the ballot box including literacy tests, poll taxes and intimidation. These actions -- combined with the passage of the discriminatory “Jim Crow” laws, and segregation practices supported by the historic Supreme Court decision *Plessy v. Ferguson* that legalized “separate but equal” public accommodations -- laid the foundation for “white supremacy” and institutional racism that relegated Black people in Georgia and other southern states to second-class citizenship.

Over the next 100 years Black citizens organized and fought to enforce their legal rights as citizens across the south and the nation to combat voter suppression and fight for civil and human rights. Black people and their allies instituted the period of peaceful protests known as the Civil Rights Movement and did so through the Black church and organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the National Urban League, for example.

The city of Atlanta played a significant role and in fact became known as the “Cradle of the Civil Rights Movement” due to the leadership of so many men and women proponents of peaceful protest.<sup>7</sup> Some of most well-known among them are the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Coretta Scott King, Rev. Ralph David Abernathy and Juanita Abernathy, Ambassador Andrew Young and Jean Young, and a youthful John Lewis, who in 1986 became the second Black GA representative to Congress since Reconstruction. Lewis’s wife Lillian joined him as an activist for justice when they married in 1968. The Atlanta-based icons worked in partnership with countless other well-known and many unknown soldiers for justice in the city and throughout the south to directly drive the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1964.

Today, there are approximately 2 million Black active voters in Georgia (with “active” being defined as voted or filled out voting-related paperwork in the last three calendar years), comprising 29.4% of Georgia’s electorate.<sup>8</sup> Also telling is the fact that the latest data suggest that there were approximately 2.5 million eligible Black voters.<sup>9</sup> Further, the voter participation rate of Black and White Georgians in the most recent 2022 general and run-off elections were as follows:



Voters in Georgia (by Race)	Count	Percentage
Black non-Hispanic	2,058,705	29%
White non-Hispanic	3,716,904	53%

Source: Georgia Secretary of State <https://sos.ga.gov/georgia-active-voters-report>

The 2020 and 2022 elections in Georgia made history in terms of turnout and outcomes. The vote elected the first Jewish senator, Jon Ossoff, in 2020/2021, and the first Black senator, Reverend Raphael Warnock in 2020/2022. They won their elections in runoffs - clearly demonstrating the power of each and every vote despite numerous unsubstantiated claims of voter fraud.

The growing Black population in the state, combined with the growing numbers of other minority groups in Georgia, opens the door for expanded political power, voice, and access to the tables where decisions are being made. When voters “reclaim their vote” and exercise their power through civic engagement, they create more opportunities for bi-partisan politics at all levels of government including state, county and municipal to advance policies and legislation that result in equitable opportunities. With such partnerships, we can ensure growth in Black business contracting, investments in education, workforce development, affordable housing, access to healthcare, and social justice reforms to combat disparities that now limit Black Georgians who make up approximately one-third of the state’s population.

## SB 202 New Voter Laws

In 2021, Georgia lawmakers passed SB 202, a bill that made sweeping changes to the state's voting laws. The controversial bill raised concerns among Democrats that changes to the absentee ballot and early voting laws would lead to increased voter suppression. Some voting rights organizations have characterized the new law as the “Anti-Voter law.”<sup>10</sup>

SB 202 bill replaced the controversial signature match system with an ID requirement for absentee ballots. Voters must use their driver’s license, state ID, voter card, or the last four digits of their social security number to verify who they are when returning the ballot. The new law also expanded the Legislature’s power over elections. This last measure raised worries that state legislators could interfere with the vote in predominantly Black counties like Fulton and Gwinnett and in rural areas of the state.

Key changes to voting regulations included:

- The absentee ballot request period is shorter, starting 11 weeks before the elections and ending 11 days before.
- Runoff elections are shortened to four weeks instead of nine.
- Tightens requirements for county elections supervisors, such as requiring them to have absentee ballots counted by 5 p.m. the day after elections.
- Bans the use of mobile voting buses for early voting except in emergencies.
- Drop boxes have been authorized for use by law but are only available during early voting hours and are placed inside early voting locations. There is also a population cap on how many can be set up. Drop boxes can be capped at one per 100,000 active voters in the county or one for every early voting location. Counties must choose between the smaller of the two. Drop boxes will only be accessible during early voting and inside of buildings that do not remain open for night drops.
- The Secretary of State would no longer chair the State Election Board, and the chair would instead be appointed by legislators.

<https://www.savannahnow.com/in-depth/news/2021/03/31/sb-202-georgia-voter-law-text-details-pdf/7001807002/&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1680008038010577&usg=AOvVaw1zMjYrghdMzwpCNE-oG9b>

## Polling Closures Deter Voter Participation

A tactic that is often used to suppress voting is closing polling sites, making it more difficult for voters to reach an assigned location. Closing polling sites can be especially harmful in rural parts of Georgia where transportation options are slim and long lines can prohibit participation. But closures also limit voter participation in metro areas that have seen population increases and longer lines with fewer polling sites. Closures have disproportionately affected precincts with large percentages of Black voters.

One Georgia county launched an effort to close all but one of the polling places, and in more than one county, Democrats were forced off the boards. One reconstituted board eliminated Sunday voting during a municipal election - an option popular among Black churchgoers, a key Democratic constituency.<sup>11</sup>

“What’s happening in Georgia with the dismantling of these county election boards is an extreme example of the national trend in Republican-controlled states to undermine local election officials,” said Jonathan Diaz, senior legal counsel for voting rights at the nonpartisan Campaign Legal Center, which advocates for broad access to the ballot.<sup>12</sup>

Republican-controlled legislators in Georgia, Texas, Arizona and Florida<sup>13</sup> all enacted new restrictions on voting in the year following President Joe Biden’s inauguration into office. Voting rights activists raised the alarm that this pattern of Republicans expanding their influence over election administration in politically competitive states reflected anti-democracy maneuvers.

Moves in Georgia to close polling places - or make other changes to electoral procedures - once required advance federal approval under the 1965 Voting Rights Act to ensure they didn’t hurt Black and minority voters.<sup>14</sup>

A Supreme Court ruling in 2013 struck down the heart of that law,<sup>15</sup> freeing Georgia and eight other states - along with a slew of counties and cities in other parts of the country with a history of racial discrimination - from that federal scrutiny. Democratic efforts to pass an updated version of the Voting Rights Act have faltered in the US Senate, and Republicans have blocked consideration of any federal voting laws.

### The Impact of Turnout on Black Georgians

The gap in turnout between White and Black voters in Georgia’s 2022 primaries was the highest it had been since at least 2014, according to a Brennan Center<sup>10</sup> analysis. While Georgia saw similar turnout numbers in November compared to the 2018 midterms, Brennan’s analysis shows that these racial turnout gaps persisted. Although overall turnout didn’t change much from 2018, this high-level statistic obscures the fact that White turnout went up while non-White turnout went down, cancelling one another out.

White turnout was 8.6 percentage points higher than non-White turnout in the midterm election this year — higher than any general election in the past decade, and roughly 50 percent higher than in the last two midterms.<sup>11</sup> This gap was driven largely by a much wider gap between White and Black voters this year. This gap was also higher than any point in the past decade — and roughly double the gap observed in 2014 and 2018, the Brennan study showed.<sup>12</sup>

According to the Brennan Center analysis, if non-White voters had turned out to vote at the same rate as White voters in the 2022 midterms, they would have cast over 267,000 additional ballots. Most of these ballots (about 176,000) would have been cast by Black voters. These “missing ballots” dwarf the count that Sen. Raphael Warnock would have needed to avoid the December runoff (43,690).

“While high turnout should be celebrated, it is not an indication that restrictive voting laws are harmless. High-level turnout numbers can be especially pernicious when they mask turnout rates moving in opposite directions for White and non-White voters,” the Brennan study found.

## Why Civic Engagement is Important Today

Georgia’s Dec. 6, 2022, runoff election pitting Democratic Sen. Raphael Warnock against Republican Herschel Walker was historic for having two Black candidates representing major parties on Georgia’s ballot. But the voting law that mandated a runoff when neither candidate won a majority in November’s election is a vestige of racist legislation.<sup>13</sup>

Since the 1960s, Georgia’s majority voting law has required a candidate get 50 percent of the vote or more to be declared the winner and was introduced by a staunch segregationist legislator named Denmark Groover.<sup>14</sup>

When “white-only primary” elections were deemed unconstitutional in 1946, Black voter registration surged across the South, including in Georgia.<sup>15</sup> In 1940, an estimated 250,000 Black southerners were registered to vote and that number rose to 775,000 by 1948, according to data from the National Park Service.<sup>16</sup>

When Groover lost reelection to the Georgia House of Representatives in 1958 despite winning the majority of the White vote, data from segregated polling places in Macon revealed that Black voters contributed to the upset victory by his opponent.<sup>17</sup>

Groover went on to win his seat back in 1963. He then led the charge to break up what he described as the “Negro Voting Block,” by transitioning Georgia from plurality voting, which allows the candidate with the most votes to be declared the winner, to majority voting - forcing voters to choose between the two candidates with the most votes in a separate runoff election.<sup>18</sup> Historian and California Institute of Technology professor Morgan Kousser says majority voting may seem innocuous, but if “the vote is racially polarized, runoffs discriminate against Blacks because they are a minority of the voters.”<sup>19</sup>

Source: <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/the-racist-history-behind-georgias-runoff-elections>

## CIVIC ENGAGEMENT STATUS TODAY

Black eligible voters in Georgia have played a significant role in driving the growth of the state’s electorate over the past two decades. Between 2000 and 2019, Georgia’s eligible voter population grew by 1.9 million, with nearly half of this increase attributed to growth in the state’s Black voting population, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of new census data.<sup>20</sup>

As an *emerging battleground state*<sup>14</sup> in national elections, Georgia’s changing electoral makeup has been the focus of renewed attention. Biden won the state by a very *narrow margin* of just 0.2%, with about 12,000 votes more than Donald Trump. But it was the first time a Democratic presidential candidate had won the state in nearly three decades.

In 2019, the Black voting population in Georgia reached a record high of 2.5 million eligible voters, making up a third of the state’s total electorate.

As a share of eligible voters in the state overall, Black voters saw a 5-percentage point increase between 2000 and 2019. This was the highest growth rate of any racial or ethnic group in Georgia - and also the largest percentage point increase among Black voters in any state in the country.<sup>21</sup>

However, there is still work to be done to mitigate the effects of voter suppression tactics, redistricting and voter apathy.<sup>22</sup>

## Georgia Legislative Black Caucus History and its Role and Standing

The Georgia Legislative Black Caucus (GLBC) was created in 1975 to enable Black legislators to form strategies for dealing with specific *legislative*<sup>23</sup> issues, to develop an agenda, and to create an outreach program for their constituency.

Between 1868 and 1907, a total 58 Black legislators served in the **Georgia General Assembly**.<sup>24</sup> After a concentrated campaign of intimidation and murder of the Black legislators led by the Ku Klux Klan as federal Reconstruction officials moved out of the south, by the 1890s most of these members had been driven from office. The final member resigned in 1907. It would be 55 years before the next Black person was elected to the legislature, when **Leroy Johnson**<sup>18</sup> won office in 1962.

The Supreme Court, in *Gray v. Sanders*<sup>25</sup> (1963), eliminated the **county unit system**<sup>26</sup> and required that Georgia follow the one-man, one-vote principle. The passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965 resulted in significant **Black voter registration**,<sup>27</sup> and in 1965 and 1966, after redistricting, eight African Americans were elected to the Georgia House of Representatives: six from **Atlanta**<sup>28</sup> (William Alexander, Julian Bond, Benjamin Brown, J. C. Daugherty, J. D. Grier, and Grace Towns Hamilton - the first woman to lead the Atlanta Urban League and the first African American woman elected to the Georgia General Assembly), and one each from **Columbus**<sup>29</sup> (Albert Thompson) and **Augusta**<sup>30</sup> (Richard Dent). Black members met periodically to discuss issues and strategies.

The GLBC, with 59 members in 2023, is one of the largest state Black legislative caucuses in the U. S.<sup>31</sup> Its success in recent years is attributable to effective organization efforts, support by winning gubernatorial candidates for the GLBC's agenda, and increased seniority and legislative leadership positions.

## Redistricting and the Impact of the Most Recent Maps

Georgia has enacted new state House and state Senate district lines, concluding its once-in-a-decade redistricting process. The state's new maps systematically weaken the political strength of Black Georgians, ensuring that despite the tremendous growth in Georgia's Black population, Black voters in Georgia will have few, if any, new political opportunities in their state's House and Senate.<sup>32</sup>

Georgia is one of the fastest growing states in the nation, and that growth has been driven entirely by Black Georgians and other Georgians of color. The growth of the state's Black and other minority communities is driving Georgia's continued economic expansion and its increasing prominence on the national stage. It is also changing the face of politics in Georgia.

Over the last decade, Georgia's Black population grew by 16 percent – almost half a million people – while the population of White Georgians fell during the same period.

Those who have held power in state government are undoubtedly worried that the growth of communities of color in the state could mean that their days are numbered unless they expand their model of representation to include communities of color. The stunning results of the 2020 election and special election, due in large part to unprecedented Black turnout, have heightened those fears.

The new maps do not reflect the tremendous growth of Georgia's Black population over the last decade. Instead, they minimize the political power of Black Georgians in violation of federal law.

Georgia's growing Black population could easily support more than a half-dozen additional new Black-majority state Senate and state House districts in areas where Black voters, despite voting cohesively, have previously been unable to elect candidates of their choice. These include new Black-majority districts in areas around metro Atlanta, Augusta, Southwestern Georgia, and potentially elsewhere across the state. But instead, in those regions and others, the state drew lines that unnecessarily "pack" large numbers of Black voters into a smaller number of districts and dissect growing Black populations in places like metro Atlanta.

These lines ensure that Black Georgians in the affected areas will be outvoted by White majorities, rather than included with their neighbors in new majority-Black districts. Thus, despite their communities' growth over the past decade, Black Georgians will have few new political opportunities in the state legislature under the new maps. Indeed, the number of Black-majority districts in Georgia will remain frozen in the same place under the state's plan — in spite of the seismic shifts in the state's population.

The state's redistricting process to dilute the voting strength of Black voters robs Black Georgians of the ability to engage in politics with equal dignity and equal opportunity. By diluting the political strength of Black voters, Georgia's newly enacted legislative maps violate Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, also known as the VRA.

The VRA is the crown jewel of the Civil Rights Movement — a hard won and sweeping national reform that sought to replace the disenfranchisement and racial discrimination of the Jim Crow era with a true multiracial democracy. Both Democratic and Republican legislators and presidents have repeatedly reauthorized and expanded the VRA.

The VRA has always applied to redistricting, and Section 2 of the VRA explicitly bars any redistricting scheme whereby members of a racial minority group "have less opportunity than other members of the electorate to participate in the political process and to elect representatives of their choice." When a state draws district lines that deny racial minorities an equal opportunity to elect candidates of their choice, that is vote dilution. These new maps do exactly that.

## *Good News! The New Legislature is the Most Diverse in the State's History*

When Georgia lawmakers took office in January 2023, they made up the most diverse Legislature the state has had. The Georgia General Assembly has mostly been composed of White lawmakers, with Black legislators beginning to be elected in the 1960s.<sup>33</sup>

Lawmakers now come from a variety of backgrounds including the first Palestinian American elected official in the state joining the Georgia House and a Bangladeshi American joining the Senate. Both are Muslim women.

"It's important for democracy to have the elected body represent the people it's representing," said [Senate Democratic Caucus Chairwoman Elena Parent](#) of Atlanta.

There are at least 83 non-White members out of 236 serving in the Legislature, including four Hispanic members, seven members of the Asian American Pacific Islander community, two Afro-Latino members and one Arab member, according to an analysis of the incoming class of lawmakers by *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.

Of the legislators, 69 are Black and 151 are White. Four members are Muslim, and one is Jewish. Eighty-one are women, one more than last year and the most ever for the state, according to the [Center for American Women and Politics](#) run by Rutgers University.<sup>34</sup>

In 2022, Georgians elected six Latinos to the General Assembly, four of them for the first time. Two of them identify as Afro-Latino. It's the first time the Legislature has had a Hispanic Caucus since a brief period in 2003 when the first Hispanic lawmakers were elected to the Georgia General Assembly. Three Hispanic men were elected that year, including Sam Zamarripa as a Democrat in the Senate.

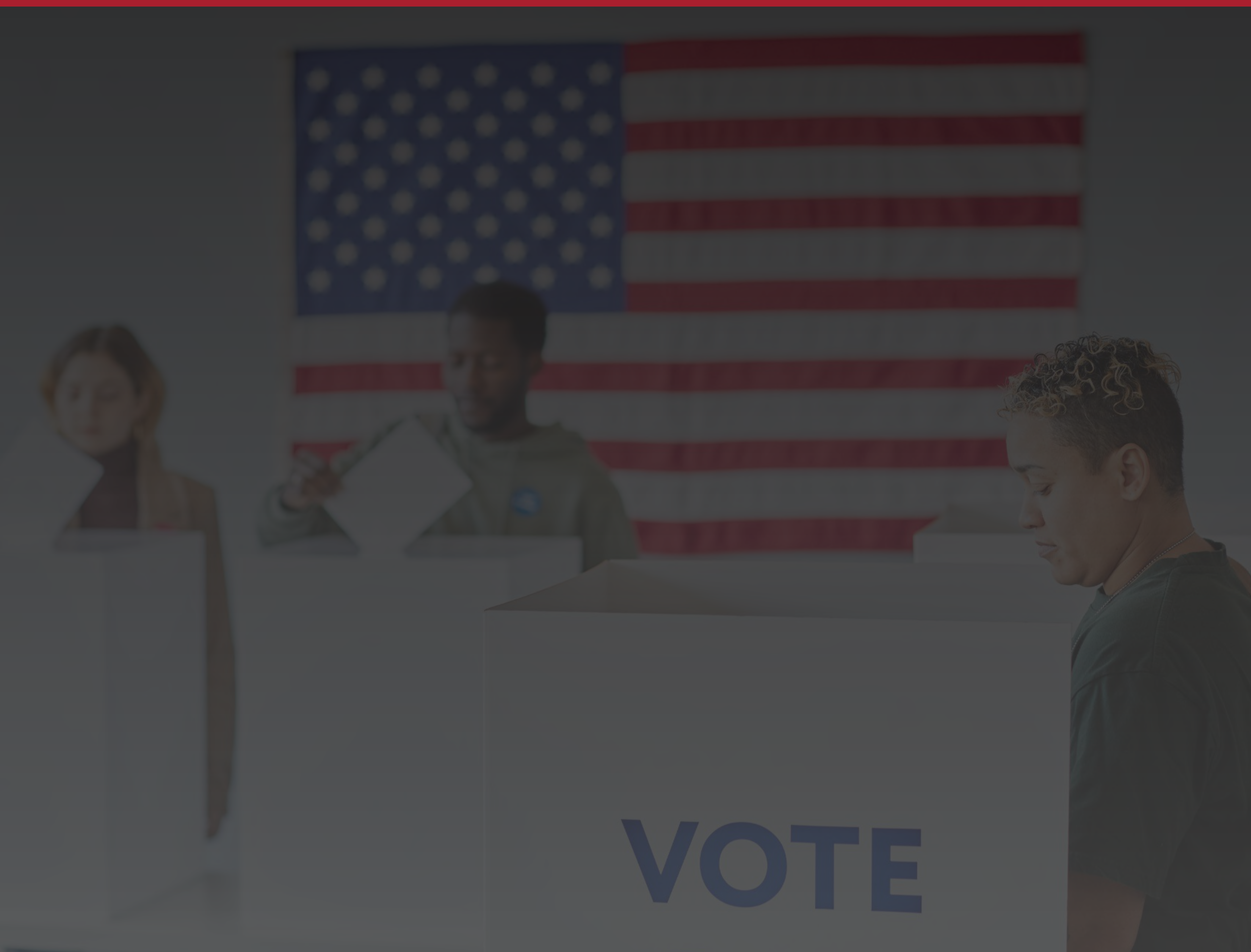
The diversity of the Legislature is beginning to catch up to the diversity of the state. Between Georgia's 2010 and 2020 census counts, the number of Black Georgians increased by 13 percent, while the White population dropped by 1 percent. The state's Asian American population jumped by 53 percent, and its Hispanic population rose by 32 percent. Georgia narrowly remained majority White at just over 50 percent.

Many of the new legislators of color come from racially diverse Gwinnett County, which added more than 41,000 Asian American residents and where the Hispanic population grew by more than 58,000 residents between 2010 and 2020.

While most of the racial and religious diversity has typically occurred among Democratic members, there were more than 15 Republican candidates of color running for 51 open seats in the House. Two candidates of color, Rep.-elect Soo Hong of Lawrenceville, who was born in South Korea, and Rey Martinez of Loganville, who is of Cuban descent, will join the House Republican Caucus in January. State Rep. Charlice Byrd of Woodstock, who is of Chinese descent, is already a member of the caucus.

Rep.-elect Ruwa Romman, a Duluth Democrat, is the first Muslim woman to serve in the Georgia House and the first Palestinian American to be elected to any public office in the state. She is the first state representative to wear a hijab, a head covering worn by some Muslim women, at the Capitol.

Now, a lot of these communities don't have to rely on an intermediary. Their voice is officially at the table. They are part of the system. They're part of the law-making process.



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State of Black Georgia

# Focus Area Author Essays

# Historical Racial Oppression Colors Georgia's Public and Private Systems

By Ray Khalfani

Focus Area / Economic Condition

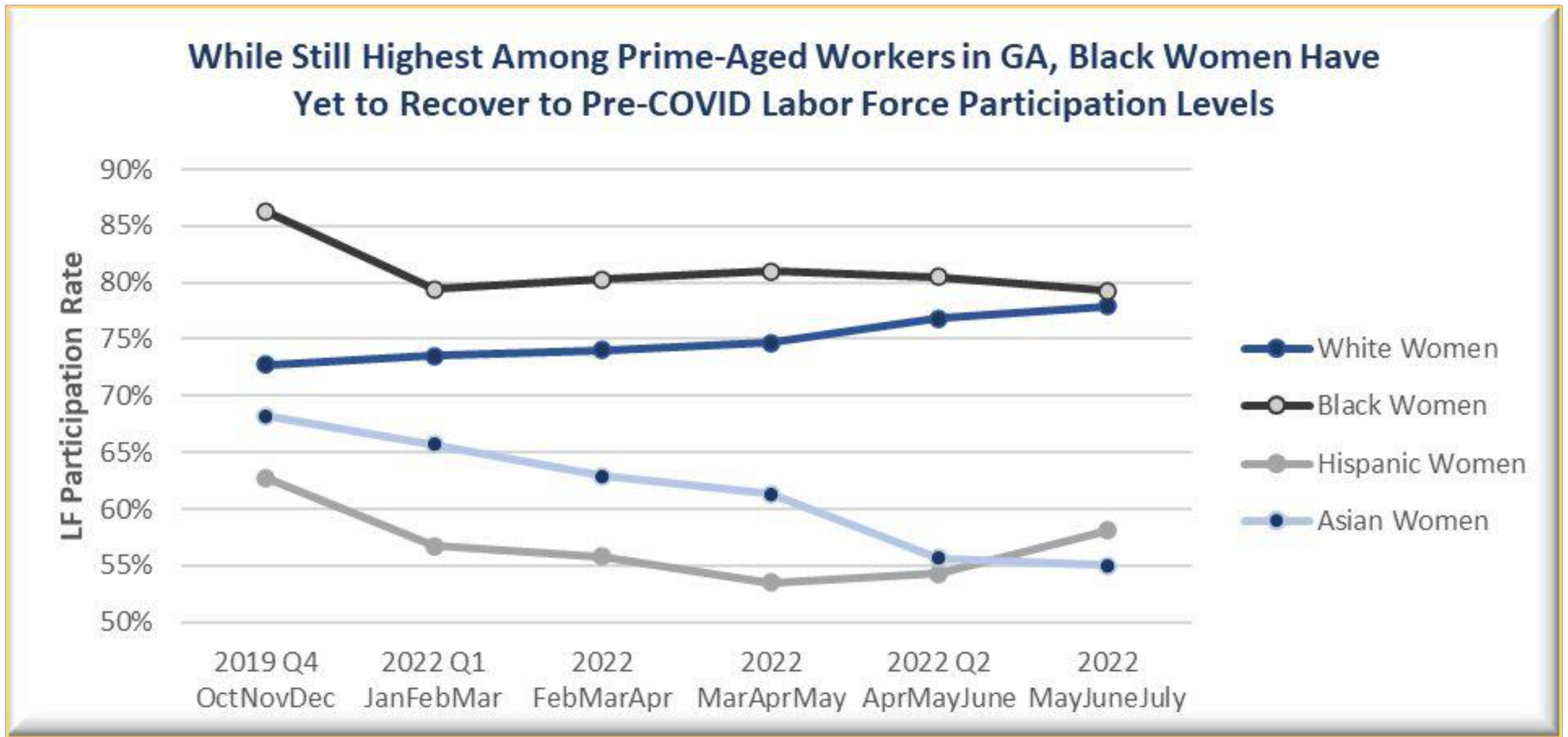
Many of Georgia's systems remain guided by policies that are historically rooted in anti-Black sentiment and have played a role in state policy responses leading up to, and throughout, Georgia's pandemic recovery. For example, Georgia's criminal legal system has a history of using criminal debts to re-enslave African Americans, such as unjust criminal fines and fees practices, and the exploitative, unpaid incarcerated labor within its state prisons. In addition, anti-Black policies and sentiment are found within Georgia's workforce system, which doesn't set statewide standards to identify and close racial disparities in employment and training, and maintains the systemic exclusion of Black workers from unemployment insurance (UI) benefits.

While maintaining a focus on employment and criminal legal system issues affecting Black communities in Georgia, we also recognize the presence of other areas the community must navigate. These include inadequate healthcare, education and social safety net investments within Black communities, and a sales and income tax structure that perpetuates racial wealth inequality.

## Georgia's Black Workforce, Job Loss, & Pandemic Recovery

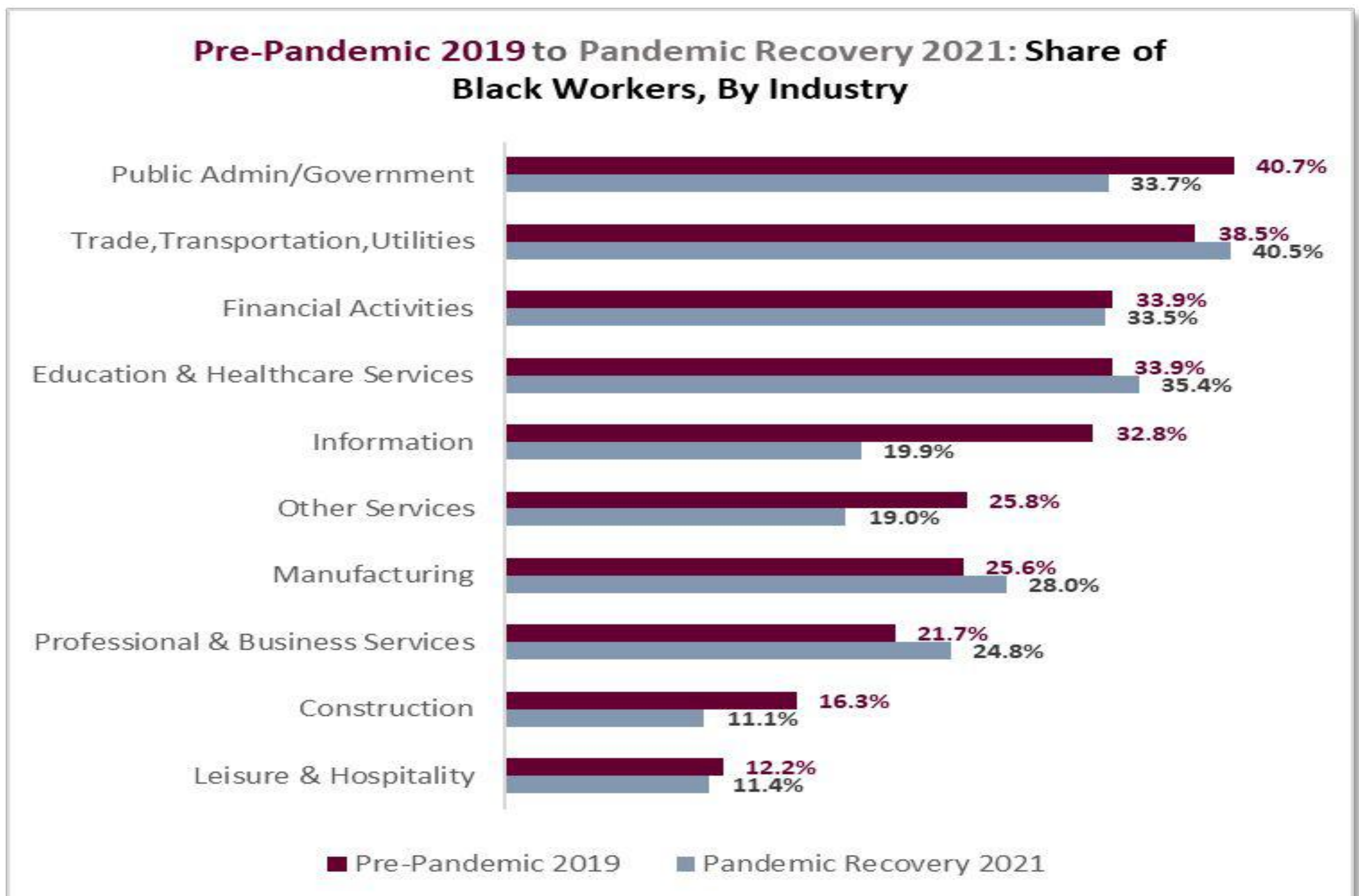
Largely attributed to federal relief funding under the CARES Act and American Rescue Plan Act, Georgians at-large and Black Georgians, in particular, have experienced some areas of significant recovery after record-setting pandemic job losses. This includes a record overall unemployment rate of 2.8% as of July, and nearly 146,000 more jobs being filled in July 2022 compared to February 2020. For Black Georgians who are actively working or seeking work, Black men's unemployment rate declined to a likely record low of 3.6 % by the second quarter of 2022, while Black women likely reached a record low of 3.9% by the same period. And the gaps among Black-White unemployment, and underemployment -- that includes involuntary part-time workers and those who want jobs but are discouraged from looking because of economic reasons -- dropped below their typical 2-to-1 ratio.

Despite those gains, Black women in Georgia, particularly those classified to be in their prime working ages, 25 to 54, continue to disproportionately experience workforce barriers. These include health concerns and lack of childcare access, impeding their ability to actively search for suitable employment or hold jobs that don't provide livable or childcare-supporting wages. This workforce activity, known as the labor force participation rate (LFPR), has yet to return to pre-pandemic levels, even as Black women continue to lead all other Georgia women in labor force participation. Black women's LFPR was more than 85 percent in late 2019, but persistent pandemic barriers maintain roadblocks to their full recovery.



Source: GBPI analysis of IPUMS Current Population Survey (CPS) microdata.

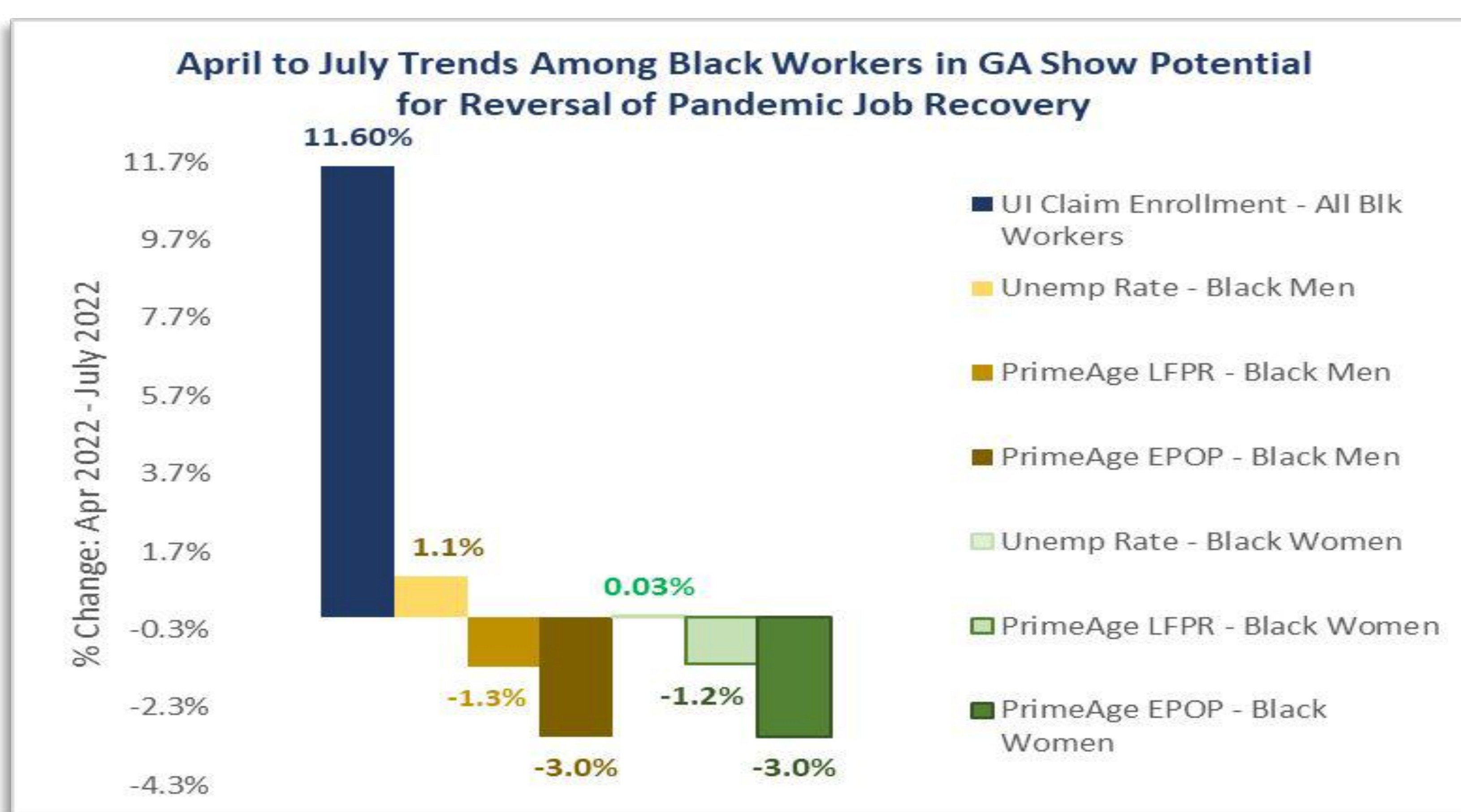
In terms of the number of quits and hires as a percent of total employment, known as the quit rate and hire rate, respectively, Georgia had a nation-leading quit rate coupled with the third highest hiring rate as of June, signifying that Georgia workers at-large are migrating to new jobs in search of greater economic mobility. Across major industry sectors, Black workers' most significant industry shifts, at large, have been an exit from Georgia's public sector. Black Georgians made up 41% of public sector workers in pre-pandemic 2019, but declined to a 34% share of federal, state, and local government jobs by 2021. Generally, the migration of Black workers by 2021, led to them having their greatest share of industry employment, 41%, in Trade, Transportation, and Utilities, following a 2019 pre-pandemic industry share of 39%.



Source: GBPI analysis of IPUMS Current Population Survey (CPS) microdata.

Federal policymakers have raised interest rates multiple times in efforts to slow inflation that Economic Policy Institute (EPI) experts attribute largely to supply chain disruptions, rising prices and corporate greed. Multiple interest rate hikes are also expected to slow the economy, and at worst, reverse the economic progress that Black Georgians have experienced. In line with recent EPI nationwide workforce analysis, Black workers in Georgia may already have begun experiencing slowdowns, with rising unemployment coupled with three consecutive months of rising UI enrollment among Black workers, fewer active jobseekers and declining employment levels among prime-age Black workers. This may signal a potentially serious trend.

While these trends signal the broad industry shifts of Black workers from pre-pandemic to 2021, they don't capture the variation, or lack thereof, of Black worker shifts across occupations within those major industries. It is likely that some Black workers in Georgia did not have, or did not perceive to have, the flexibility, power, or luxury to change professions in the quest for better pay and overall job quality. Those experiencing poverty and on the margins of financial and household stability, may often be trapped in cycles of instability or employment barriers that create heightened challenges in finding better paying, more suitable jobs. This dynamic is likely at its worst among formerly incarcerated Georgians, who are disproportionately Black.



Source: GBPI Analyses of DOL ETA 203 Reports and IPUMS Current Population Survey (CPS) microdata.

*Beyond comparison with other states, Georgia locks up more people per capita than any democracy on earth.*

## INCARCERATION & WORKPLACE EXPLOITATION

For formerly incarcerated Black Georgians, even a relatively short period of incarceration can create significant barriers to employment. Formerly incarcerated people often experience poverty before they go to prison, and joblessness as they reenter civilian life can push them into deeper poverty. Black Georgians experiencing poverty often have contact with the criminal legal system that is linked with an inability to make full, up-front payments toward fines and fees. The inability to pay these debts can quickly spiral into further harms, which at their least damaging could lead to employment barriers due to probation, driver's license suspension and more debt. These barriers only create impossible choices to meet basic needs or pay debt, exacerbating desperation that increases the likelihood of incarceration.

Black Georgians who have been incarcerated face the worst workplace exploitation, which is tied to private profiteering and overreliance on sanctioning economically vulnerable Georgians to balance public budgets. Georgia's public and private reliance on largely unpaid incarcerated labor contributes to the billions received every year in sales tax revenue. This has an outsized impact on Black Georgians, who make up nearly 60% of those incarcerated in Georgia's state prisons, despite only making up 31% of the state population. *Beyond comparison with other states, Georgia locks up more people per capita than any democracy on earth.*

## FINES & FEES

From the height of the pandemic to now, Georgia's working-class Black families were forced to navigate the sharpest labor market disruptions and pandemic cuts to critical state services like public education, health care and social services. At the same time, they were disproportionately hit by local governments seeking to balance budgets through abusive levels of reliance on fines and fees revenue, particularly from minor traffic violations and misdemeanors. For example, in Georgia, even unpaid traffic citation debts can be criminalized, and for Black Georgians living paycheck to paycheck, a hundred dollar-or-more traffic citation could be unaffordable.

The inability to make full, up-front payments toward fines and fees is often treated as a poverty penalty that spirals to more insurmountable debts, probation, driver's license suspension and long-term criminal legal system involvement - each of which creates greater employment barriers. Punitive fines associated with an offense, plus fees, which are solely meant to create revenue for state and local governments, can add up quickly. They serve as revenue for cash-strapped or abusive governments who seek to balance their budgets on the backs of impoverished Georgians and communities of color, and often weaponize law enforcement and court systems to forcibly extract revenue in ways that prioritize profit over public safety. Furthermore, with the nation's highest probation rate, partially driven by the criminalization of individuals who cannot afford to pay court debts, Georgia's governing structure incentivizes abusive revenue-gathering practices that have led to hundreds of localities, surpassing totals within nearly any other state, serving as fines and fees debt traps to Georgians who experience poverty.

In 2021, Georgia had nearly 300 municipalities and counties that balanced their budgets with fines and fees revenue that made up more than the national average of 2% of overall revenue. Ferguson, Missouri, which gained national exposure because of the police killing of Michael Brown and the racial and financial exploitation present in its fines and fees practices, had fines and fees overreliance that covered 23% of its total local revenue in 2015. In 2021, Georgia had 26 localities that had fines and fees overreliance that matched or exceeded the level of Ferguson. And when Black poverty and fines and fees abuse collide across Georgia localities, the broader trend is nothing short of predatory.

## CONCLUSION: Mixed policies lead to an uneven post-pandemic recovery

From the height of the pandemic to now, Black Georgians have experienced a mixed bag of policy responses that have brought a mixed recovery. Within the last few months, they have experienced record lows in unemployment, a labor market that ushered workers into jobs at levels that surpassed 2019 pre-pandemic periods, and made significant pandemic job shifts across industries, including a sizeable transition away from public sector employment. However, inadequate investments in public services and childcare infrastructure, a criminal legal system that prioritizes profit over justice at record levels, and the possibilities of another economic slowdown demand anti-racist policy approaches to create state systems that intentionally apply a racial lens in their quest for progress.

## Ray Khalfani

Senior Analyst, Worker Justice and Criminal  
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Georgia Budget and Policy Institute



## SOBG 2022 policy recommendations for State Legislators and Leadership

- 1 **Invest in data infrastructure** that produces and institutionalizes publicly available, state-level, monthly labor market data disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and gender, to ultimately center workforce policy responses with a racial equity lens.
- 2 **Commit to addressing racial disparities** in outcomes within statewide workforce training plans, beginning with investments in the production of program-level workforce training outcome data disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and gender.
- 3 **End Georgia's inhumane reliance on state and local revenue sources** that depend on the criminalization of poverty, such as court fines and fees, the bail system, unpaid incarcerated labor, and incarceration fees, which cause and/or perpetuate economic hardships and barriers to prosperity among an outsized share of Black communities in Georgia.



# State of Housing for Black Georgians

By Dr. Bambie Hayes-Brown and Natallie Keiser

Focus Area / Economic Condition

Georgia has a great asset for creating better housing opportunities for Black residents - the many Black leaders who are dedicating their skills to this space. From nonprofit community development organizations like J.C. Visions and Associates in Hinesville to for-profit developers of affordable housing like Urban Oasis to advocacy groups like the Housing Justice League, we are truly rich in Black leadership. There are also champions among our elected officials, such as Gwinnett County Chairwoman, Nichole Love Hendrickson and Albany City Commissioner, Demetrius Young. However, we know well the challenge that they face.

During our country's long history of systemic racism, housing was used to segregate races and to economically elevate White families while preventing economic growth for Black families. Federal programs that promote homeownership as a path to build wealth, including the mortgage interest deduction, the GI Bill and Federal Housing Administration mortgage insurance, were not equitably available.

It wasn't until after the Fair Housing Act of 1968 that Black people had full legal protection from housing discrimination, but bias persisted in public systems. Additionally, in the private sector we have seen how racial bias has contributed to housing opportunity gaps, such as documented differences in appraisals between similar homes owned by White people and Black people, and the targeted predatory lending to Black communities prior to the foreclosure crisis.

As a result, in our country, about 72% of White families own their homes, while only 43% of Black families own theirs. The gap is larger than it was in 1960, when race-based discrimination in homeownership was legal. Georgia follows this trend with a 25% gap between White and Black homeownership levels. Interestingly, Augusta has one of the smallest racial homeownership gaps among urban areas, but it is still nothing to brag about at about 22%. When there is an economic disruption, the gap between White and Black homeownership grows. Populations with less financial stability take longer to recover. We saw this with the last recession, where the racial gap in homeownership increased by about 2% points.

The cost burden experienced by Black renters in Georgia contributes to the difficulty of achieving homeownership. In Georgia, 51% of Black renters are cost burdened (paying more than 30% of their income on rent) as compared to 40% of White renters. We have a shortage of about 207,000 affordable rental units. While Georgia is not immune to the issues increasing rents nationally, we also have some unique challenges. Georgia is among a few locations where corporate investments in single family rental properties are focused. This concentration of investment tends to push rents higher and lead to other market complications.



Georgia's overall unhoused population had been dropping prior to the pandemic. However, Black residents make up a disproportionate share of the homeless for many reasons, including less access to healthcare, mass incarceration and housing discrimination. The impact of the pandemic years is not fully reflected in the data yet, but it is likely that escalating rents and evictions are increasing homelessness rates. Rural Georgia has seen an uptick in people camping in the woods and doubling up in housing.

## Georgia's Black leaders and their allies are working on state policy changes to **address these challenges:**

- Strengthen housing stability for families facing eviction by joining the 40 states that provide a tenant right to cure. This Bill will require a written notice of past due rent and seven days for the tenant to cure the past due amount, prior to filing an eviction. (House Bill 408)
- Strike the Georgia law (GA Code § 36-74-30 (2020) ) that prevents rental registries in order to allow public disclosure by local jurisdictions of who owns rental properties. This would identify who is the property owner, allowing local governments to more effectively enforce housing codes and hold owners accountable when rights are being violated or harmful conditions created.
- Support legislation codifying a warranty of habitability, a provision that makes clear that a rental contract for residential housing means that the property is fit for human habitation.
- Support the right for low-income tenants facing evictions to have access to publicly funded legal counsel.
- Allow local jurisdictions to pass source of income protections that would prevent landlords from discriminating against people with housing vouchers.
- Support dedicated revenue for a state Housing Trust Fund to increase the overall housing supply that is retained as affordable long term, and seed this Housing Trust Fund from the state's excess revenue surplus to address the current supply deficit.
- Increase funding for the existing state Housing Trust Fund for the Homeless, using dollars from the state's \$6.57 billion excess revenue surplus. The state has budgeted this fund at an exceedingly inadequate \$3 million or less for the past 15 years.
- Support property tax exemptions for income-restricted, affordable rental properties operated by nonprofit organizations. This would help preserve existing affordable rental housing in the face of tax increases, and it would support the development of additional affordable rental housing by decreasing operating cost projections.

## Natallie Keiser

CEO  
HouseATL



## About HouseATL

HouseATL is a cross-sector group of civic leaders committed to building the public will for a coordinated housing affordability action plan for Atlanta. HouseATL's vision is that Atlanta will have a shared, comprehensive set of policies and adequate funding to address housing affordability. HouseATL's members have worked together to define root causes of the affordable housing challenge, examine the data, look at best practices and engage in thoughtful problem-solving to make concrete recommendations on a path forward.

[www.houseatl.org](http://www.houseatl.org)

## Dr. Bambi Hayes-Brown

CEO  
Georgia ACT



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<sup>1</sup> Example - <https://propertytaxproject.uchicago.edu/>

<sup>2</sup> The Federal Housing Finance Administration recently released 47 million appraisal reports from 2013-2021 to allow for analysis. Homes in white neighborhoods appraised as much as 3x higher than a similar home in a community of color.

<sup>3</sup> National Association of Realtors

<https://cdn.nar.realtor/sites/default/files/documents/2022-snapshot-of-race-and-home-buying-in-the-us-04-26-2022.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> National Association of Realtors

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/mapping-black-homeownership-gap>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.epi.org/blog/the-great-recession-education-race-and-homeownership/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://nlihc.org/housing-needs-by-state/georgia>

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/reports/files/Harvard\\_JCHS\\_State\\_Nations\\_Housing\\_2022.pdf](https://www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/reports/files/Harvard_JCHS_State_Nations_Housing_2022.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> [Single-Family Investor Activity Remained High in the Third Quarter - CoreLogic®](#)

<sup>10</sup> A research report from Georgia Tech found that the concentration of large corporate investment activities in single family rental in Atlanta metropolitan neighborhoods weakened local homeownership, mainly for Black residents.

([https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=4156851](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4156851)),

<sup>11</sup> <https://endhomelessness.org/homelessness-in-america/homelessness-statistics/state-of-homelessness-dashboards/?State=Georgia>

<sup>12</sup> <https://endhomelessness.org/homelessness-in-america/homelessness-statistics/state-of-homelessness/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.gpb.org/news/2022/08/29/homelessness-problem-in-rural-georgia>



# Black Businesses Matter in Georgia

By Markee Tate

Focus Area / Small Businesses

The Atlanta Black Chambers, Inc.'s mission is to advocate for the creation and growth of competitive, profitable, and sustainable Black-owned entities. As business owners, we can influence and positively promote Georgia while gaining economic control of our communities. Opening the door for Black business owners to gain access to financing will lead to the wealth, quality education, and sustainable job creation so long denied to Black communities.

Black-owned businesses matter because our strength is the foundation of economic well-being in our communities and beyond. One way to advance our goal is through advocating for the equitable inclusion of Black entrepreneurs in government contracting at the local, state, and federal levels. We actively support public policy that drives an increase in and enforcement of contracts for Black entrepreneurs.

Currently, Black businesses are approximately 27% of the small businesses in the state of Georgia. According to the latest disparity studies, state government contracting awarded to Black businesses is less than 2%. The latest Small Business Administration disaggregated data show federal government contracts awarded to Black businesses are 1.67%. The time is now for Black business owners, including young entrepreneurs, to wield our power to advance public policy initiatives to increase more equitable contracting for Black businesses.

At the same time, our organization recognizes the need to close the achievement gap created by the inequality in educational opportunities, especially in training for high demand fields and in affordability of higher learning institutions. We also understand that perceptions of our worth -- that lead to police brutality and public-private sector disinvestment - change when we become major owners of businesses and other properties that can transform neighborhoods. We must demand transformational public policy that specifically benefits Black communities where disinvestment has caused generational harm.

In 2021 there were over 300,000 Black businesses in Georgia. Their average revenue was \$58,000 annually. The average revenue of White businesses is \$658,000.

Our staggeringly low measure of wealth, created by systemic racial barriers, diminishes our chances of gaining the startup capital we must initially invest in our businesses. This underlying economic crisis plagues our community, affecting our schools, income, health care, and social status, and it directly affects the growth and sustainability of Black businesses.



Owning real estate is one path to creating wealth. Becoming a business owner is another. But for the masses in our community, such opportunities will not open until we succeed in our demand for transformational public policy change. Exercising our voting rights at the polls for local, state, and national elections is a vital key to making our voices heard. Those candidates we support in upcoming and future elections should state their positions on the Black agenda for transformational public policy or significant public policy intervention that builds Black American wealth and closes the racial wealth gap.

The Atlanta Chambers calls on Black organizations and those of our allies to commit to advocate for policies from our law enforcement, finance, and health agencies to create more economic opportunities for Black people. These policies should result in an increase in the number of sustainable Black-owned businesses, high-demand jobs, and the long-term wealth we've been historically denied.

Join us in continuing to address racial bias as we pursue fair access to financial opportunity for our businesses. Let's use our voices as business leaders and community advocates to amplify our message and close the racial wealth gap. Together, we will be successful in our efforts to ensure equity and opportunity toward a sustainable future for our community and those beyond.

## Markee Tate

President & CEO  
Atlanta Black Chambers, Inc



***Opening the door for Black business owners to gain access to financing will lead to the wealth, quality education, and sustainable job creation so long denied to Black communities.***



# New educational pathways built from contrasting frameworks: Du Bois vs. Washington Remixed

By Jermaine Whirl

Focus Area / Post-Secondary Education

Workforce development, education, talent development, the Great Resignation, and the Great Shuffling are a few words and phrases one may read in today's headlines on the state of jobs and the economy throughout the country. In nearly every case, the racial and "economic class" gaps in education and earning power are at the center of the story and the quest for solutions.

Even before the pandemic, data showed that employment outcomes and opportunities for African Americans and other people of color are vastly unequal to their majority counterparts. This is especially true for Black men. But with history behind us and job availability in abundance, why do these disparities continue to exist? More importantly, what tools, techniques, or models are available to help rectify a long-standing issue? Let us go back in time to a philosophical discussion about African American educational pathways proposed by two thought leaders of the past: W.E.B. Dubois and Booker T. Washington.

Dr. Dubois experienced a traditional pathway to "academic success." He was valedictorian of his class and went on to be the first African American male to earn a PhD from Harvard University. His ideals of education were to have African Americans receive what we would identify as a liberal arts education, including the classics. He wanted to ensure that African Americans had wide educational choices not limited to a vocational path.

Dr. Washington, on the other hand, believed that African Americans should obtain a trade that was practical in nature and would allow them to earn wages as well as provide services and products for themselves. He founded Tuskegee University in 1881 to train African Americans in agriculture and industry to advance the economic progress of the race. The two noted educators famously debated the issue at the dawn of the 20th century

## A lingering effect on pathways to economic stability

This schism in approach to education played out over the next century and resulted in a period of time when vocational training was dropped as a standard offering in typical public high schools. Only in the mid-1980s did vocational education experience a revival as a desirable pathway to economic stability, and educators delved into ways to reintegrate it as a pathway for students who were not on the four-year college track.

Still, within educational circles, including in African American communities, stigmas and perceptions have lingered in the debate over the value of vocational vs. liberal arts training. The question is, was Dubois right or did Booker T. hold the key? Or were they both right?

The thoughts expressed by both men remain valid. Oftentimes, employers will say, “I want a graduate with good soft skills and the technical knowledge to succeed in the job.” I believe that today’s student, specifically the African American student, would have a competitive advantage with both liberal arts and technical training under their belts for long-term success.

“Options” is the key word for today’s students, and these options should start in their middle and high school curriculums. Options vary based upon where individuals reside, but typically they are available, i.e., AP, IB, Honors, etc., more than they were 10 years ago. As a sitting two-year college president, I want to highlight two tuition-free options students and parents in Georgia should take advantage of to set students up for success. These options build on the ideals of Dr. Dubois and Dr. Washington

## “Options” is a necessary key

The first option is an early essentials certificate program. Offered throughout the State of Georgia, this certificate program is designed for students who expect to spend four years in high school. It allows students to take 18 credit hours of liberal arts courses (history, science, math, etc.) equating to a semester and a half of college work. Students who want to take liberal arts courses and pick up a few technical courses can complete another 18 credit hours and earn a technical specialist certificate. This allows them to complete one year of college while in high school.

For other students, a traditional high school curriculum is not exciting, and their level of engagement is low. SB2, a program known as Option B, was created by the Georgia State Legislature with these students in mind. This pathway, designed by the Georgia Department of Education and the Technical College System of Georgia, allows an alternative to high school completion outside of the traditional liberal arts curriculum.

The program requires students to complete their 9th and 10th grade high school years in their assigned school. Once they enter 11th grade, they can enter a technical program full-time and complete one of the following: an associate degree, a diploma, or two technical certificate programs. In doing so, students will get their college credentials and their high school diploma at the same time! The program includes multiple pathways ranging from aviation technicians, healthcare, information technology, early childcare, HVAC, automotive and more.

Recently, at Augusta Technical College, six of our students completed a welding course and were able to go to work immediately with high school and college diplomas in hand. Moreover, an African American male student completed his high school diploma and associate degree in nuclear engineering technology at the college. He started as a junior on a full-ride scholarship at **Georgia Tech this fall semester!**

## Affordable education toward livable wages

Uniquely, the untapped opportunity within all of this is that students who are employable right after high school can make a livable wage, and the employers of today are more than willing to pay for their bachelor’s, master’s or even doctorate degrees as an employee benefit.

African American families specifically win with these programs, as they no longer face the burden of struggling to help finance their children’s education in high demand fields that carry high tuition. I believe the 19th century ideals of both W.E.B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington ring true today and can both be accommodated in this 21st century.

I am an example. I attended a vocational high school, graduated from a technical college, and went on to earn a doctorate degree. I don't believe it should be a choice of either or/better or best. It's simply a matter of what option works best for each student and how we can accelerate these opportunities for communities that need them the most.

To learn more about these programs check out: [www.tcsg.edu/dualenrollment/resources-and-links/](http://www.tcsg.edu/dualenrollment/resources-and-links/)



## Dr. Jermaine Whirl

President  
Augusta Technical College



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*I believe that today's student, specifically the African American student, would have a competitive advantage with both liberal arts and technical training under their belts for long-term success.*

# Literacy and Justice for All - Finally

By Ryan Lee-James, Ph.D. and Comer Yates

Focus Area / Pre-K & Secondary Education

## Georgia is failing its children

Georgia is in crisis. Only 30% of all our state's children are reading proficiently by 4th grade. If a child cannot learn to read by 4th grade, their chances of becoming someone who can read to learn are extremely limited. Statistics tell us what we do not want to face: This is the destiny we have inflicted upon the overwhelming majority of our Black children.

Reading statistics for Georgia illustrate the vast disparities based on race and socioeconomic status. According to the National Association of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2022, the literacy rates in Georgia for Black children and White children are - respectively - 21% and 43%. (This comparison itself is problematic, because "white" should not be the standard here. But the gap points to a universal and unsustainable educational failure in our state along clear racial lines.)

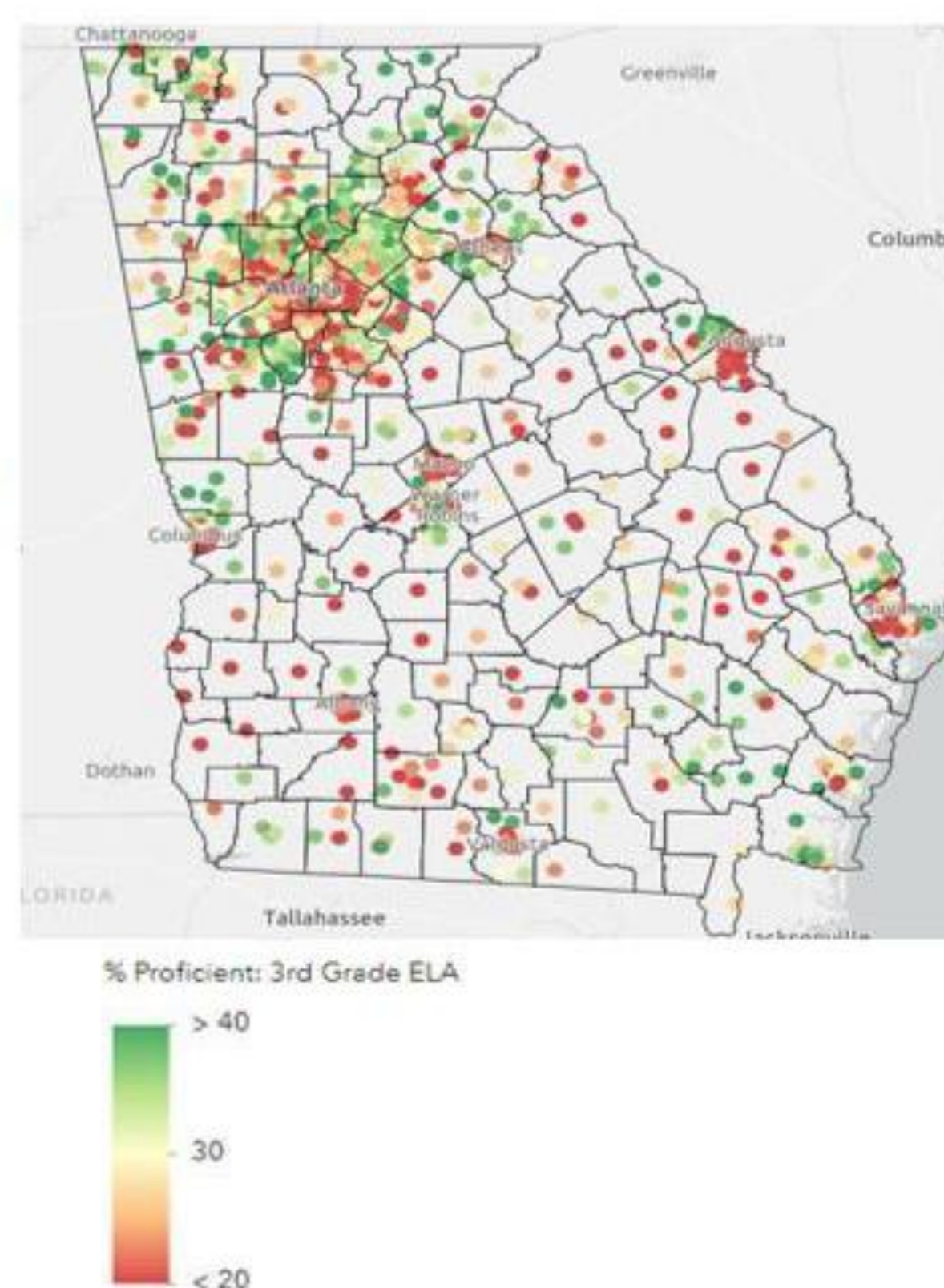
### Reading Belongs to ALL of us.

*Today, in Georgia, only 30% of children are reading proficiently by fourth grade. It is a statewide crisis. We all need to respond to the governor's call to action.*

*I want people's potential not to be decided by their zip code or what county they live in. I want everyone in the state to have opportunities wherever they live. That is my focus. We're doing a lot of things to move the needle there.*  
- Governor Brian Kemp

### Georgia Must Ensure Every Child Can Read

Literacy is not the only determinant for success, but without **Literacy**, all outcomes are at risk: illiteracy creates lost economic opportunity and major health risks and costs.





Georgia is not alone. Illiteracy has been deemed a public health crisis by the National Institutes of Health - a condition directly linked to short- and long-term health outcomes. In other words, illiteracy offers children a shortened lifetime of poorer health and a diminished chance to decide their own future. And for Georgia, millions of children are a metric that carries countless devastating and untenable economic and social implications.

There is no comfort, however, in the fact that Georgia is not alone. Atlanta, for instance, ranks 2nd in the country among large cities for having the greatest racial disparities in access to literacy; for Black children, only 11% are reading proficiently by fourth grade, compared to 65% of White children (NAEP, Urban Data, 2022). This standing is particularly tragic in the home state of so many noted Black leaders and scholars -- Hamilton Holmes, Sara Randolph Bailey, Andrew Young, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Coretta Scott King, Beverly Daniel Tatum...and the list goes on.

## **Black culture has always focused on literacy**

Liberation through literacy has been a north star for Black people in American History -- and human history. Beyond proficiency as defined by NAEP, true liberation is about following one's own path -- one not designed, defined, or limited by others. Dr. Ghody Muhammad explains that for Black culture, the pursuit of literacy has always been driven by an understanding of "reading and writing as transformative acts to improve self and society" -- not acts focused singularly on the Black race, but rather ones to better humanity at large. Literacy becomes revealed as the essential means to rid the world of "anti-Blackness," racism, and structural inequities designed to erase the contributions and negate the inherent humanity of Black people, indigenous people, and all people of color. False, deficit-based, anti-Black narratives have been perpetuated for centuries to silence Black people. Literacy stands in direct opposition to these prejudices and assumptions.

## **Resistance to Black liberation has shaped Georgia's educational story**

The idea of literacy as liberation was a threat to slaveowners and the "white" economic system created by and for the direct beneficiaries of the exploitation of Black people. White fear of Black liberation resulted in systems of oppression, including denied educational opportunity. A Slave Code in Georgia, passed by the General Assembly in 1829, specifically denied literacy to Black children: "In Georgia, if a white teach a free negro or slave to read or write, he is fined 500 dollars, and imprisoned at the discretion of the court; if the offender be a colored man, bond or free, he is to be fined or whipped at the discretion of the court." It was critical to anchor in laws the brutal fiction that portrayed Black people as property, not persons.

Contrast that Code to the Black response. Consider this example from the February 11, 1837 issue of the Weekly Advocate Newspaper, one of the first African American publications, and one quoted by Dr. Muhammad in *Unearthing Joy*, "He that would be an intelligent person must be a reading person...By reading you may ascend to those remote regions where other spheres encircle other suns, where other stars illumine a new expanse of skies and enkindle the most sublime emotions that can animate the human soul."

Now, 186 years after those words were written, rather than reaching for the stars, our children are trapped in granite, with literacy still denied. Just as Stone Mountain is a monument to the old Confederacy, so is our education system in Georgia a monument to old slave codes. Albeit unintentionally, the system continues in effect to honor the Confederacy's objective of denying freedom to Black children.



## We now know more clearly than ever what children need.

Science tells us what the writer in the Weekly Advocate knew in 1837: Proficiency is not the destination. The destination, through literacy, is liberation. Further scholarly research has shown us the key to liberation lies in the overarching power of something called “the Deep Reading Brain.” In short, the Deep Reading Brain feels empathy, thinks critically, and provides a child the chance to write the story of their life rather than having it written for them.

**To reach the destination of a Deep Reading Brain, the science must be applied with fidelity. We know what to do:**



**Ensure every child can find their voice.** Breakthroughs in brain science - especially from the 1990s onward -- make clear the critical importance of teaching every child from birth “to listen” rather than demanding him or her to “be quiet.” Building capacity to engage with the words, thoughts and emotions of others is a neurological nonnegotiable- especially when preparing children to learn to read.



**We need systems, classrooms and teachers who value connection over compliance.** Safety, acceptance, and connection are critical to the brain’s ability to learn, yet Black children are hyperregulated in school from a very young age - suspended at a rate several times higher than White children for similar conduct. Georgia is in the top 10 states for suspending pre-K students, effectively “criminalizing” 4- and 5-year-olds in a way which profoundly impacts literacy outcomes and carries a huge cost. Only 14.5 percent of students suspended one or two times read proficiently in third grade, compared to 38% of students who were never suspended.



**We need teachers who are prepared to provide science-proven structured literary instruction that is explicit, systematic, cumulative, and diagnostic.** Based on a GBPI analysis of Educator Experience data from the Governor’s Office of Student Achievement, “Black Belt students are 21 percent more likely to be taught by teachers with fewer than four years of experience...and 28 percent more likely to have teachers that are teaching “out-of-field,” meaning they are not teaching the subject in which they are licensed or certified.” (The Black Belt refers to the social history of the geological region known as the Black Belt, where highly fertile black soil and Black slave population defined the economy.)



**We need measures beyond the current standardized tests.** While we know there are many aptitudes, standardized tests of achievement are biased and obscure the potential, intelligence, and creativity of children.



**Every child should see themselves in the curriculum used to teach them.** Our system must ensure the teaching of accurate and complete history - including the legacy of Black forebears: resistance, creativity, social action, and transformation. Black history is human history, and a plethora of rich examples of Black contributions are available to make certain our children see themselves reflected in what is taught.

### The solution requires an integrated ecosystem

In Georgia, many organizations are working to overcome systemic educational oppression. Get Georgia Reading, Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students (GEEARS), Grady Health Systems and Learn4Life are some of the groups that have joined together in recent years to take on the demanding challenge to eradicate illiteracy.

The Atlanta Speech School’s Rollins Center for Language & Literacy, through its free online Cox Campus, partners with organizations and experts to democratize the sciences of healthy brain development, language acquisition and reading brain construction - making coursework, content, and community free to all. We commit to literacy and justice for all through the equity-based learning platform where together with partners we build the expertise and agency needed so that every adult can play a role in helping each child find their voice and live boldly to reshape the world.

Every child everywhere deserves a voice. When we change course, and equitably distribute teaching practices that are science-based, the children that too many have worked so hard to forget - for generations -- will benefit the most. And they will shape the future their ancestors imagined.

*Child poverty and neglect, racial disparities in systems that serve children, and the pipeline to prison are not acts of God. They are America's immoral political and economic choices that can and must be changed with strong political, corporate and community leadership*

-Marian Wright Edelman, Founder of Children's Defense Fund - The Cradle to Prison Pipeline - America's New Apartheid

## Dr. Ryan Lee-James

Chief Academic Officer, Atlanta Speech School,  
Director, Rollins Center for Language & Literacy



Dr. Ryan Lee-James is the Chief Academic Officer and the Director of the Rollins Center for Language & Literacy and its Cox Campus. She is an ASHA certified speech-language pathologist and published author with expertise in language development, language disorders, and literacy in the context of linguistic differences and socioeconomic disadvantage and believes that eventually, all children will be liberated through language and literacy.

## Comer Yates

Executive Director  
Atlanta Speech School



Comer Yates has served for 25 years as Executive Director of the Atlanta Speech School. The Speech School, founded 85 years ago as a free clinic for children who were deaf or hard of hearing, has evolved into the nation's most comprehensive language and literacy center that consists of four schools, clinical programs and the Rollins Center for Language and Literacy.

# The System's Alienating Impact

By Doug Ammar

Focus Area / Social Justice

When it comes to the common understanding of the criminal justice system, what people usually picture in their minds is incarceration - handcuffs, steel bars, razor wire, orange jumpsuits. People assume that this is where it ends - getting arrested, going to prison, doing the “time,” and then getting released and going home. But the problem extends far beyond that. The criminal justice system is an alienating force - systematically ostracizing and othering those who get trapped within it, creating an invisible caste system within our communities that separates those who have a criminal record from those who do not.

Incarceration is certainly a large part of the issue - the U.S. incarcerates more individuals per capita than any other country in the world, a fact that most people are aware of. But what people often don't know is that being behind bars is not the only, or even the most significant, way that the system traps and keeps people in a cycle of poverty and criminal involvement. Some have dubbed being “**justice involved**” as creating “**perpetual punishment**” - continuing long after the official sentence is complete.

An arrest by itself, without a conviction, can create severe obstacles. And a criminal conviction is all but certain to create significant lifetime consequences: for instance, lengthy probation sentences and a criminal record that follows you around like a scarlet letter, blocking good jobs or safe housing for you and your kids at every step of the way. These lingering effects place virtual hog-tie shackles on a massive number of people in the US, disproportionately people of color.

## The Criminal Legal System

### By the Eye-Popping Numbers

In Georgia, nearly 90,000 people are incarcerated (in jail or prison). Black Georgians are disproportionately represented in this number (i.e., the percent of incarcerated Georgians who are African American is double the percent in the general population). But the problem is much larger than incarceration. Lower-income people and people of color are unduly ensnared at the front end. And once the system grabs hold of you, it keeps you.

## Approximately 527,000 Georgians are under correctional control

(including people in jail/prison or on probation/parole).

That's 1 in 18 Georgians, by far the highest rate in the country. Georgia's high correctional control numbers are largely due to the nearly 200,000 people on felony probation in Georgia, many of whom are no longer at risk of re-offending. While most states limit probation to 3-5 years, not so in Georgia. The average felony probation sentence in Georgia is 6.6 years, with 40% of Georgia's felony probationers spending over 10 years on probation.

Still, we have not reached the most overwhelming number of all - 4.6 million people have a Georgia criminal history - approximately 40% of adults. (See the below "Arc of Justice" for a graphic representation.)



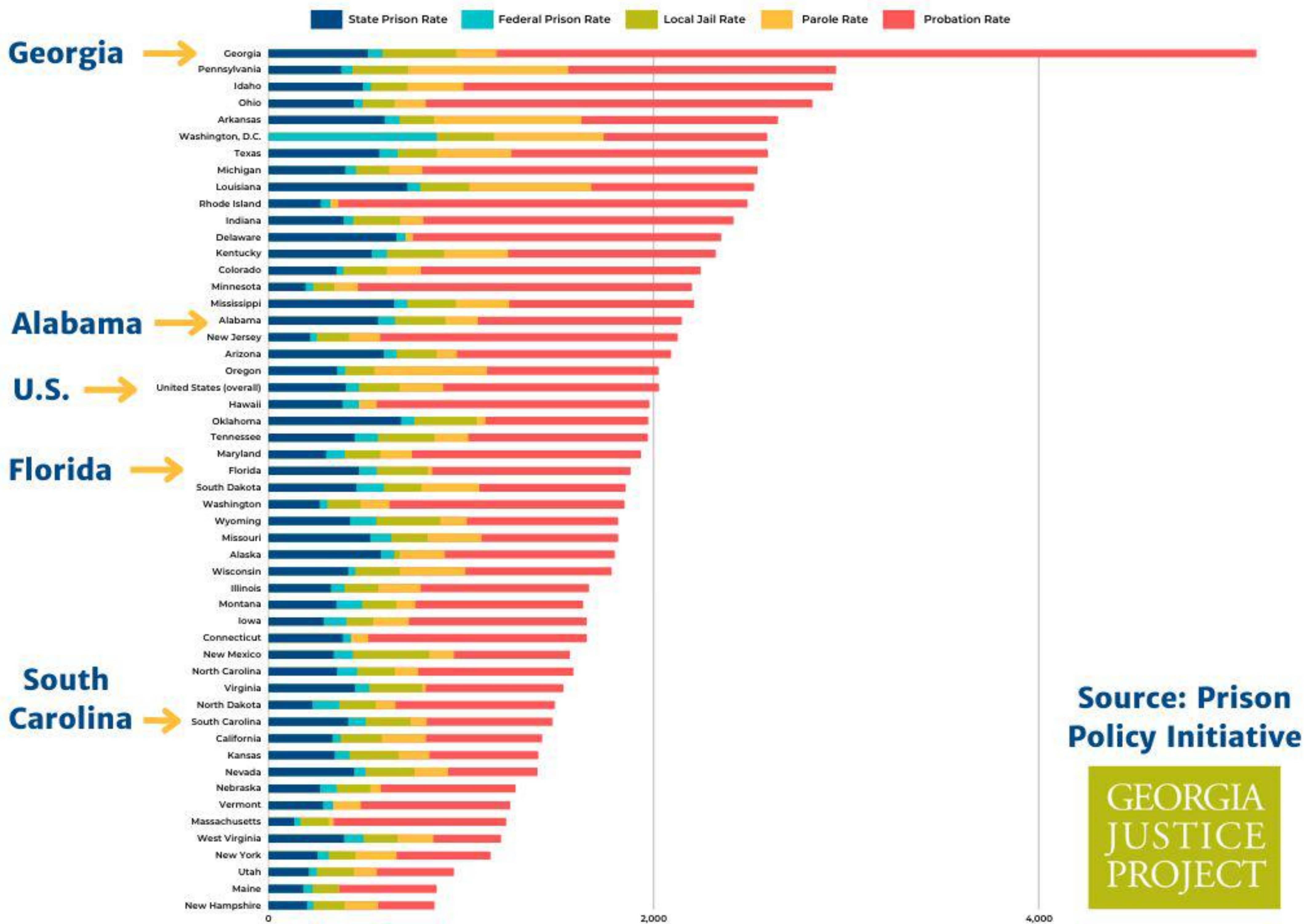
Presented another way, more than 1 in every 3 adults in our state has a criminal record - i.e., they have either been arrested and/or convicted. Studies show that 50% of American children have at least one parent with a criminal record (likely higher in Georgia). It stands to reason the criminal justice system actively and systematically harms a majority of Georgia's communities, Black communities in particular.

Correctional Control per capita - mentioned above - is visually represented below by another graph. This shows how far out of step Georgia is with the rest of country, unfortunately. As the bar graph illustrates, others aren't even close!

Some have dubbed being "justice involved" as creating "perpetual punishment" - continuing long after the official sentence is complete.



## Rates of Correctional Control by State



Source: Prison Policy Initiative



What positions Georgia so far ahead is felony probation. Racial disparities exist in these numbers, too. If we want Georgia NOT to be the nation's leader in correctional control, we must address felony probation.

For some, facing this reality of racial inequity in our communities may seem too overwhelming, or demoralizing. But I ask folks to look at it from a different perspective: These numbers provide a sobering reality of the work we must do.

## WHO IS GEORGIA JUSTICE PROJECT?

Georgia Justice Project (GJP) has spent over three decades seeking fairness and true justice for Georgia's accused and convicted citizens. Our office, located on the same block as The King Center and Historic Ebenezer Baptist Church, is in the shadow of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s burial site. Dr. King spoke of the "Beloved Community" - his vision for the future - where all people would share in the wealth of our planet, and where poverty and alienation would no longer be tolerated. In the place where we do our work every day, we are reminded of the inclusive, whole community we are working toward.

Over the years, we've represented many Georgians and their families who have been torn apart by the criminal legal system and stood with them as they rebuilt their lives. In this work, we get to know our clients and their struggles intimately and we intervene on their behalf within a broken system, using that knowledge to then enact meaningful criminal justice reform in our state. Georgia has a very long way to go, but we have seen evidence that our state can be a fairer and more just place for everyone.

At GJP, we're primarily working toward two ends: (1) to decrease the overwhelming number of Georgians under correctional control and (2) to remove reentry barriers, such as bars to employment and housing for folks with a criminal record. We do this in primarily three ways:

- (1) Direct Service: through legal and social services including holistic criminal defense, expungement representation and counseling, early termination of probation, and other reentry services.
- (2) Policy Reform: advocating for a better Georgia, resulting in 22 changes to Georgia law so far.
- (3) Outreach & Education: educating communities statewide on criminal justice and reentry issues.

GJP is principally a direct service organization. We offer free legal representation on several critical issues. Our policy goals and objectives come from the thousands of Georgians we serve every year.

## Recent Policy Victories

Over the last two years, GJP's advocacy efforts have culminated in significant gains. The successes have fueled economic and social progress for low-income communities derailed by the criminal justice system in a number of ways. In 2020, we drafted and successfully advocated for the passing of Georgia's new "Second Chance Law," which expanded expungement to include convictions for some misdemeanors and some pardoned felony convictions. This was a first for Georgia. A conviction should not be a life sentence to poverty, and this new law helped move Georgia closer to that reality. Up to 1.5 million Georgians potentially benefit from this new law.

In 2021, GJP also drafted and championed Georgia's new probation reform law, which created a path for Georgians on probation to terminate their probation sentences early after three years if all milestones have been met. This is a significant step, as Georgia's lengthy probation sentences, with no caps, are the primary contributing factor to the state's very high rate of correctional control - 40% of all Georgia probation sentences exceed 10 years. As of the signing of this law, 48,000 Georgians were immediately eligible for early termination of parole.

Most recently (2022), GJP successfully advocated for a new law that eliminated automatic driver's license suspensions for missing traffic court (i.e., FTA- failure to appear). A person might miss court for understandable reasons, yet over 100,000 Georgians automatically lose their licenses annually simply for missing a date, affecting their ability to maintain gainful employment and meet family obligations. The new law ends automatic suspensions and lets the court decide, based on facts. **This law will reduce the annual number of suspended licenses as well as the 50,000 correlating annual arrests.**

## “Fighting For” versus “Fighting Against” something

GJP's approach to policy is generative. It is easier to create social and legislative momentum when we ask folks to join us to build the reality we envision. We use our intellectual and social capital to forge new paths and solve tough problems with specific solutions. Our approach allows a wide array of stakeholders to join us and help us address difficult situations with focused legislation.

Our recent policy victories are significant, and they are informed by the individual legal services we provide every day. Georgia Justice Project's entry into policy advocacy in 2008 grew out of our representation of individuals denied housing vouchers due to their criminal record. Through that work, we saw that systemic change was necessary for our state and started working to change the law.

More recently, GJP's probation reform efforts and efforts to reduce driver's license suspensions came out of our work at Metro Reentry Facility (MRF). MRF is a new prison in Atlanta that employs an alternative model for preparing returning citizens to reenter their communities. This unique concept focuses resources during pre-release programming (e.g., life skills, work skills, family connections) to support successful reentry.

GJP was with MRF before the Department of Corrections opened the doors in 2018. Now GJP's attorneys and social workers survey, advise, and represent hundreds of residents each week as they prepare for release. Novel work is happening as lawyers go into prisons and help remove barriers before reentry.

Through representing clients at MRF, we learned that people in prison have several reentry legal barriers. Over 35% had unresolved cases or probation matters, and over 50% faced a suspended license due to debt, missed court dates, or unresolved/unpaid traffic tickets, NOT for dangerous driving. GJP knew that these issues could be addressed legislatively to help incarcerated Georgians across the state.

## GJP's 2023 Policy Goals

During the upcoming Georgia Legislative session, we are focusing on three issues:

- (1) Expungement
- (2) Occupational Licensing
- (3) Restorative Justice

**Expungement:** Having a conviction on one's record is still one of the biggest barriers to getting a job or housing. It remains one of the biggest obstacles to successful reentry. Though substantial expungement reform (mentioned above) occurred in 2020, we have more work to do. We want to expand the number of misdemeanor convictions that can be expunged for rehabilitated folks. In addition, providing a wider path for those who have a felony conviction who haven't reoffended is critical to expanding the workforce as well as ensuring lower recidivism.

**Occupational Licensing:** Having a criminal record can be a barrier not just for obtaining a job, but also to earning an occupational license. Here are some quick statistics:

- An occupational license is required for 1 in 7 jobs.
- Because 40% of adult Georgians have a criminal record, they may be barred from obtaining the license to work these jobs - even if their record is old, pardoned, or expunged.

**Having a job is the best antidote to recidivism.** We should do everything we can to allow justice-involved folks to work - it helps all of us. Other southern states, including Mississippi, have enacted reforms allowing for a fairer process. We think Georgia should do the same.

**Restorative Justice** -- Enabling Restorative, Victim-Centered Diversional Programs: GJP is starting a Restorative Justice Center. Restorative justice is a process involving those affected by an incident to collectively identify and address harms, needs, and obligations to heal and make things right. It is a victim and community centered approach to crime. Instead of simply arresting, convicting, and punishing someone for a crime, a restorative justice approach seeks to make the victim whole and holds the person responsible accountable to the community - not simply to the system. Statutory reforms, particularly changes to the evidence code, can better enable local jurisdictions to enact such programs.

## Doug Ammar

Executive Director  
Georgia Justice Project



## Building a More Beloved Community

The legacy of slavery and mass incarceration is still very present and visible in our state, and there is much work to be done. But there is hope, and we've seen proof that Georgia can become a more equitable and just place. The more we break down barriers to opportunity and community for those stigmatized by the criminal justice system, the closer we will get to a world where all people are met with love, dignity, and fulfillment.





# Stand Up for Access to Optimal Healthcare for All

By Michelle Nelson

Focus Area / Health Conditions

Georgia receives an A grade as it excels in commerce and an F as it fails in healthcare. The professor in me would like to drop that F all the way to a Z that it truly deserves.

The incongruence in grading is stark. Our Peach State excels in technological advancements, corporate locations, entertainment and production, pro-business incentives, sports ... you name it. In 2021, Georgia was ranked the #1 state to do business for the eighth year in a row according to Area Development. Yet, at the same time, Georgia ranks near or at the bottom for many healthcare indicators based on age, race, gender, socioeconomic status and zip code.

How does a state sustain a prosperous lifestyle with poor health and alarming mortality statistics on the rise?

Lack of access to care, health disparities, discrimination, systemic racism ... all are buzzwords that have been churned for decades with little significant, positive outcomes when addressed on behalf of those most affected. If you are Black and poor, living in rural Georgia, you stand very little chance of receiving optimal healthcare delivery when compared to other groups. Maternal mortality rankings are abysmal. Black women rank last, losing their lives 3 to 4 times more than their White counterparts. Can a state truly be prosperous without healthy women and babies?

## Racism takes a toll in every sector

The COVID pandemic has laid bare the depth and breadth of the social inequality precluding Georgia's Black citizens from receiving equitable care and resources. Citizens of diverse ages and backgrounds deserve the right to optimal healthcare that is available and affordable. There is no greater right to fight for. Georgia's Black citizens have been burdened with healthcare costs leading to crushing debt, neighborhood redlining, vaccine hesitancy, stripping away of reproductive care and rights, burgeoning HIV and AIDS rates, gun violence, police brutality and the opioid epidemic. These are not the only issues where Black Georgians fare poorly compared to other racial groups.

Many of Georgia's 159 counties have food deserts, no healthcare providers, lack of Wi-Fi access, economic instability, inadequate housing and education, as well as increasing rates of discrimination and unequal treatment in the criminal justice system.

The Georgia Board of Health Care Workforce reports that nine counties are without any doctors (Webster, Turner, Treutlen, Taliaferro, Talbot, Schley, Montgomery, Echols and Chattahoochee). Additionally, 18 counties have no primary care physicians, 69 are without pediatricians, and 76 have no obstetrician or gynecologist. Of the approximately 25,000 physicians serving 11 million Georgians, only 5.5% are Black, further compounding and exacerbating an environment steeped in cultural distrust of the medical establishment. Patients and clients often have better outcomes when treated by providers that look and sound like them. Cultural literacy enhances the patient experience when providers are knowledgeable and intentional with meeting the specific cultural needs of the African Diaspora.

## The path to well-being

What is the prescription for all of these ills? I suggest it is the advancement in health equity to counteract the effects social determinants of health have on underserved and underrepresented populations. Removing barriers to care is the starting point.



Allow all providers inclusive of Physicians, Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs), Physician Assistants (PAs), and Registered Nurses (RNs) to practice to the highest levels of their education, training, experience, and certification. Medical providers play a vital role in healthcare delivery.



Expand Medicaid to address access for the under- and uninsured, thereby meeting the needs of the most vulnerable and helping to avoid crippling hospital closures such as Atlanta Medical Center.



Understand and accept that racism has played a crucial and debilitating part in the marginalization of Black Georgians by contributing to the systematic inaccessibility of healthcare resources.

*Vote for legislators who will pass meaningful legislation aimed at addressing disparate health outcomes.*

### Michelle Nelson

Clinical Associate Professor  
Clayton State University  
School of Nursing



## Here is your call to action.

Become energized, determined, and motivated to deliver change, demand change, create change and step into our rightful roles as stewards of optimal healthcare. Educate yourself on the issues. Vote for legislators who will pass meaningful legislation aimed at addressing disparate health outcomes. When they get into office, hold them accountable, because they work for you. You are their employer, and they are the employees!

Guard your health and take care of yourself to the best of your ability. Stand up for access to safe, quality, affordable healthcare for all. Declare and decree that change will come, and you will do your part to usher it in. Raise your voice and make anyone who can hear your voice understand you promote justice, fairness, equity, inclusion, diversity, access, professionalism, collegiality, evidence-based practice, pride in your healthcare providers, patients' rights, positive change, boldness, greatness, and most of all, love for mankind. Stand up and claim it.

# A call for policies that align with the experience, perspectives, and needs of Generation Z

By Evan Malbrough

Focus Area / Civic Engagement

Generation Z is defined by Pew as those born between 1997-2012. This generation has lived and survived tumultuous political and social events that have molded their policy and outlook on America as a whole. Many in Generation Z and younger millennials have lost faith in major institutions such as government, financial, and media, and have used platforms like social media as a means to voice displeasure and call for change. When you look at what drives Generation Z, you see a group that does not accept systems that have persisted for years and decades but rather one that entertains the idea of new systems to replace the old.

Consider this: A person born in 1997 was 4 when 9/11 occurred, 6 when Iraq was invaded, 8 when Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, 11 when the housing market and the global economy collapsed, 15 when Trayvon Martin died, 18 during the 2016 Presidential Election, and 22 when the Covid 19 Pandemic changed society forever.

Generation Z's political beliefs have been largely shaped by the view that each of these extreme events was caused by a failure of an institution. These failures -- along with social media giving rise to "opinions" being treated as facts -- have colored how most young people view older definitions of "democracy," "respectability," and "government by the people" as somewhat untrustworthy routes to Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.

As a result, young people today tend to look for robust changes to the current system that they view as unsustainable, inhospitable, and inequitable. The 2022 Deloitte Millennial and Gen Z survey found that "Almost half of Gen Zs (46%) and millennials (47%) live paycheck to paycheck and worry they won't be able to cover their expenses." Many millennials and Gen Zs are on track to fare worse economically than their parents. These factors have contributed to masses of young people examining leftist ideologies like socialism and communism as opposed to capitalism. The lack of faith in our current society and economy has pushed this generation to generally distrust the systems that our nation promotes.

**Despite it all, young people are as civically engaged as they ever were.**

In the state of Georgia, 21% of all votes cast in the 2020 Presidential Election and subsequent runoff were cast by young people. On top of that turnout, young people mobilized in cities across Georgia and the entire country in response to the murders of George Floyd and Ahmaud Arbery, making their voices heard and standing up for members of their community.

## It is the duty of the older generations and the political establishment to recognize this new generation of voters as a constituency with a specific set of policy needs

Young people are also adding life to the union movement and turning to unions to help advance their material conditions through wage increases and job security. Finally, many young people feel like it is their duty to make change in their community. A 2020 poll from Tufts University states that “83% say they believe young people have the power to change the country, 60% feel like they’re part of a movement that will vote to express its views, and 79% of young people say the COVID-19 pandemic has helped them realize that politics impact their everyday lives.” These high numbers show that in the wake of institutional failures and political disillusionment, young people are still willing to engage to propel progress in our state and country.



### Evan Malbrough

Fellow ACLU of Georgia  
Board Member of Andrew Goodman Foundation



### A message from Gen Z

It is the duty of the older generations and the political establishment to recognize this new generation of voters as a constituency with a specific set of policy needs. These young people are demanding policies that are designed to end homelessness by enacting free housing programs; end child poverty through child tax credit measures; increase economic mobility by raising the minimum wage; forgive student loans; and institute a green infrastructure and economic package that takes on climate change.

Young people are not a constituency that needs to manage their expectations, but rather a community of stakeholders who have a vested economic, social, and political interest in our current system of democracy - if it is willing to accept positive change. If we are to move forward and be prepared to adequately respond to catastrophic events such as the 2008 economic crash, the Covid-19 pandemic, and climate-change related weather disasters, society needs to both listen to and work with the generation that came of age during these turbulent time, Gen Z, because we are the future leaders of our communities.

Evan is an ACLU of Georgia Fellow and in this article, he is speaking for himself and does not represent the ACLU of Georgia.



# A Rural Perspective: A Personal View of “Two Georgias”

By CaMia H. Jackson

Focus Area / Rural

For several years, I’d heard the expression, “There are two Georgias - Atlanta and the rest of Georgia.” I grew up experiencing these two Georgias, being from Albany and spending a large part of my childhood and adult years in Atlanta. Fast forward, there have been significant changes but there are STILL two Georgias.

Today, Rural Georgia - encompassing geographic areas where 40.13% of Georgians live -- continues to be secondhand to Atlanta and other metropolitan areas. Rural Georgians are unceasingly plagued with issues related to subpar healthcare, education, housing, and economic opportunities, as well as unfair justice systems and blatant racism with fewer recourses for solutions than those found in urban areas.

Money and power are root causes of many of these issues. Economic equality and funding are desperately needed to bring these issues on par with the state capital and its metropolitan areas.

## Healthcare

Lack of insurance and access to medical care hits rural areas particularly fiercely. Georgia’s governing body has the immediate power to fully expand Medicaid, which would insure 600,000-700,000 more Georgians and improve access to care, yet those in power refuse to do so. Georgia is one of the 12 states that chose to not fully expand Medicaid. Under Governor Brian Kemp, Georgia’s uninsured rate is the 2nd highest in the nation at 14.5% and the majority of those uninsured live in rural Georgia. Rural Georgians have less access to insurance from an employer and insufficient income to buy it for themselves and their families on the open market.

As a former state legislator, I witnessed first-hand the vapid excuses given as to why Medicaid expansion is a bad idea. In the past four years alone, we have seen six hospital closures in rural areas and those close to Black and Brown communities. I’ve spoken to a number of healthcare professionals who work in underserved communities, and they all say the same thing - with the majority of their patients being uninsured or unable to pay for services rendered, the hospitals cannot afford to keep their doors open.

Because of these closures, the hospital system in my district in Albany, Phoebe Healthcare System, serves over 40 counties. That means that 500,000 residents depend on this hospital. This is a massive number to support when Georgia is also experiencing a huge deficit in its nurse, doctor, and related healthcare workforce.

Aside from the pandemic fallout, there are other healthcare issues that rural Georgia continues to battle. Rural Georgia has the highest rates of maternal and infant mortality in the state. Additionally, years of disinvestment and racist policies lock rural Georgians, especially those in Black and Brown communities, out of the support needed to help conquer mental health issues, opioid addictions, and the continued rise in deaths by overdoses, suicides, and domestic abuse incidents.

## Education

Right now, the Georgia Education Lottery Reserves sits right at \$1.9 Billion. If lawmakers disburse these funds equitably, \$1.9 billion can atone for racism and oppression and lift obstacles hindering Black families from obtaining and building wealth, including those in rural areas.

Sadly, many of the lottery dollars are unused while rural Georgia schools are struggling. There have been a few good practices of good stewardship such as providing raises for pre-K teachers, and Chancellor Sonny Purdue just recently announced that Georgia’s HOPE programs would go from 60% to 100% funding. This could help more rural students afford to go to college, and it could expand HOPE career grants for high-demand careers for those at the associate degree level. This would greatly improve rural Georgia’s economy as we continue to experience workforce shortages due to lack of education and opportunity.

Another great use of this surplus would be to fund need-based HOPE Scholarships to address the high cost of college for struggling students throughout the state. Over the years, we’ve seen the HOPE scholarship program morph into anything but HOPE as more funding was channeled to support students who were NOT need-based recipients stripping away resources from students living in poverty who could have become the first in their families to graduate from college.

With \$1.9 Billion in reserves, Georgia could dedicate the interest income from reserves to rural Georgia educational needs instead of putting it back into the state treasury. This income could help address issues rural Georgia is facing with COVID 19 learning losses, student transportation and broadband access to give students 24-hour access to the same information needed for studies that non-rural communities have.

## Housing

The housing and homelessness situation continues to be a grave issue for rural Georgians. I have met a record number of constituents who have either faced housing issues or homelessness over the past three years. I’ve had constituents as old as 92 years old be evicted from their homes because landlords began price gouging during the pandemic. Many of these elderly people are on fixed incomes, so they could not afford to remain in their homes.

Rural communities are experiencing an increase in people living in tent encampments in forested areas due to the lack of emergency shelters and other places for people to live while getting back on their feet. The rural Georgia upsurge of homeless people, including those recently out of jail and those who are without jobs, is also exacerbated by those struggling with untreated addictions to opioids, alcohol, or methamphetamines.

Unfortunately, due to lack of government funding, a number of the emergency shelters and transitional housing units have shuttered. Some of the people without shelter have no choice but to sleep in the woods. Forested communities of homeless people have popped up throughout rural Georgia. A small investment could provide adequate transitional shelters for people facing homelessness rural areas.

While there is a federal rental assistance program, it only serves about one in four people who need it to gain affordable housing. The rural service agencies that could help do not have the financial resources nor support staff to help ease the issue. A young, college-degreed mother with a newborn who was temporarily unhoused turned to me for help. Even with my contacts, I could not find a way to help her get housing support. Finally, I decided to let her move in with me until she could get back on her feet. I couldn’t help but think about the thousands of Georgians who confront these issues every single day and have no one to take them in or help them maneuver through all of the red tape necessary to just have a roof over their heads.

## Economics

The unemployment rate for rural Georgia is 3.9% and 4.5% for Black rural Georgia. Unemployment in rural Georgia is higher than in metropolitan areas, where the economy is diversified. Increased state government workforce financial support to rural areas could help people stave off or climb out of poverty. Unfortunately, the effects of the recession (or price-gouging) threatening the nation, hit rural counties worse than metropolitan areas. Officials need to look for empathetic, equitable ways to address these issues.

Rural economies depend heavily on agriculture and, often, a single industry provides the jobs for a majority of people in a small town. The people who have lost their jobs often have only one set of vocational skills. Also, a high number of unemployed people in rural Georgia are older, but not quite old enough for retirement. They need to be retrained in jobs appropriate for their abilities and physical strength.

Rural communities also need support from the state and county governments to offer tax incentives to attract industry and businesses to locate in rural communities more. These incentives foster the building of more diverse rural and regional economies to create livable wage jobs with healthcare and fringe benefits, provide access to job skills training and support talent retention. Rural communities struggle to retain talent due to limited growth opportunities that is contributing to the economic hardships of rural communities.

Another key to stabilizing rural economies is to help grow and sustain small businesses. Rural Georgians, especially those who are non-White, are disproportionately discriminated against when seeking small business loans and funding. This is quite disheartening because many of these small business owners, whether current or aspiring, have sustainable business plans and models but aren't given fair opportunities to succeed.

Georgia's government also needs to invest more money in diversified job training for youth and adult rural workers, to teach them new vocational skills in preparation for 21st century jobs, or entrepreneurship, when the economy does rebound.

### CaMia H. Jackson

State Representative  
Georgia House District 153



*The cliché that the Georgia budget is a moral document is misleading because **the immorality and disregard for rural Georgians and the fights they face every single day of their lives prove to be evident as long as Georgia's government turns a blind eye to these rural-focused crises.***

*Until then, let's continue to advocate for change and to work toward the day that we become ONE Georgia.*

## State of Black Georgia

# Regional Community Summaries

	Albany MSA	Atlanta MSA	Augusta MSA	Columbus MSA	Macon MSA	Savannah MSA	State Summary
<b>Total Population</b>	53.6%	34.2%	35.3%	42.0%	44.6%	33.5%	31.6%
<b>Below Poverty Rate</b>	71.7%	46.6%	56.0%	59.1%	63.3%	51.2%	44.1%
<b>Unemployment Rate</b>	12.20%	7.70%	10.00%	9.6%	9.10%	10.30%	8.30%
<b>Owner Occupied Households</b>	40.9%	48.80%	52.20%	47.00%	44.10%	45.40%	47.80%
<b>Population with no HS Degree</b>	18.1%	8.90%	15.80%	15.50%	17.10%	13.20%	12.40%
<b>Infant Deaths</b>	80.0%	58.60%	78.60%	69.0%	76.00%	61.50%	54.50%
<b>Does not have health insurance</b>	58%	35.00%	37.00%	49.0%	49.00%	37.00%	32.00%
<b>Active Voters</b>	49.30%	32.20%	32.90%	41.40%	44.70%	29.20%	29.40%

	State Summary	Data Interpretation
<b>Total Population</b>	31.6%	Black residents account for 31.6% of the State of Georgia.
<b>Below Poverty Rate</b>	44.1%	Of the total population below poverty in the State of Georgia, 44.1% are Black.
<b>Unemployment Rate</b>	8.30%	The Black unemployment rate in the State of Georgia is 8.3%
<b>Owner Occupied Households</b>	47.80%	Of the Black households in the State of Georgia, 47.8% were owner occupied.
<b>Population with no HS Degree</b>	12.40%	Of all Black people that are 25 years or older in the State of Georgia, 12.4% do not have a High School Degree.
<b>Infant Deaths</b>	54.50%	Of all infant deaths in the State of Georgia, 54.5% are Black.
<b>Does not have health insurance</b>	32.00%	Of the total population who are non-institutionalized and do not have health insurance in the State of Georgia, 32% are Black.
<b>Active Voters</b>	29.40%	Of all active voters in the State of Georgia, 29.4% are Black.



# ALBANY MSA

On Tuesday, June 28, 2022, the Urban League of Greater Atlanta traveled to Albany State University's East Campus to participate in a community conversation on the Economic, Healthcare, Education, Social Justice, and Civic Engagement conditions facing those living and working in the Albany metropolitan area.

(Sherwood Church)

## Highlights of the Albany Community Conversation

Our conversation included an interactive session, where participants commented on challenges such as food insecurity, the lack of affordable housing, and the need for increased access to public transportation.

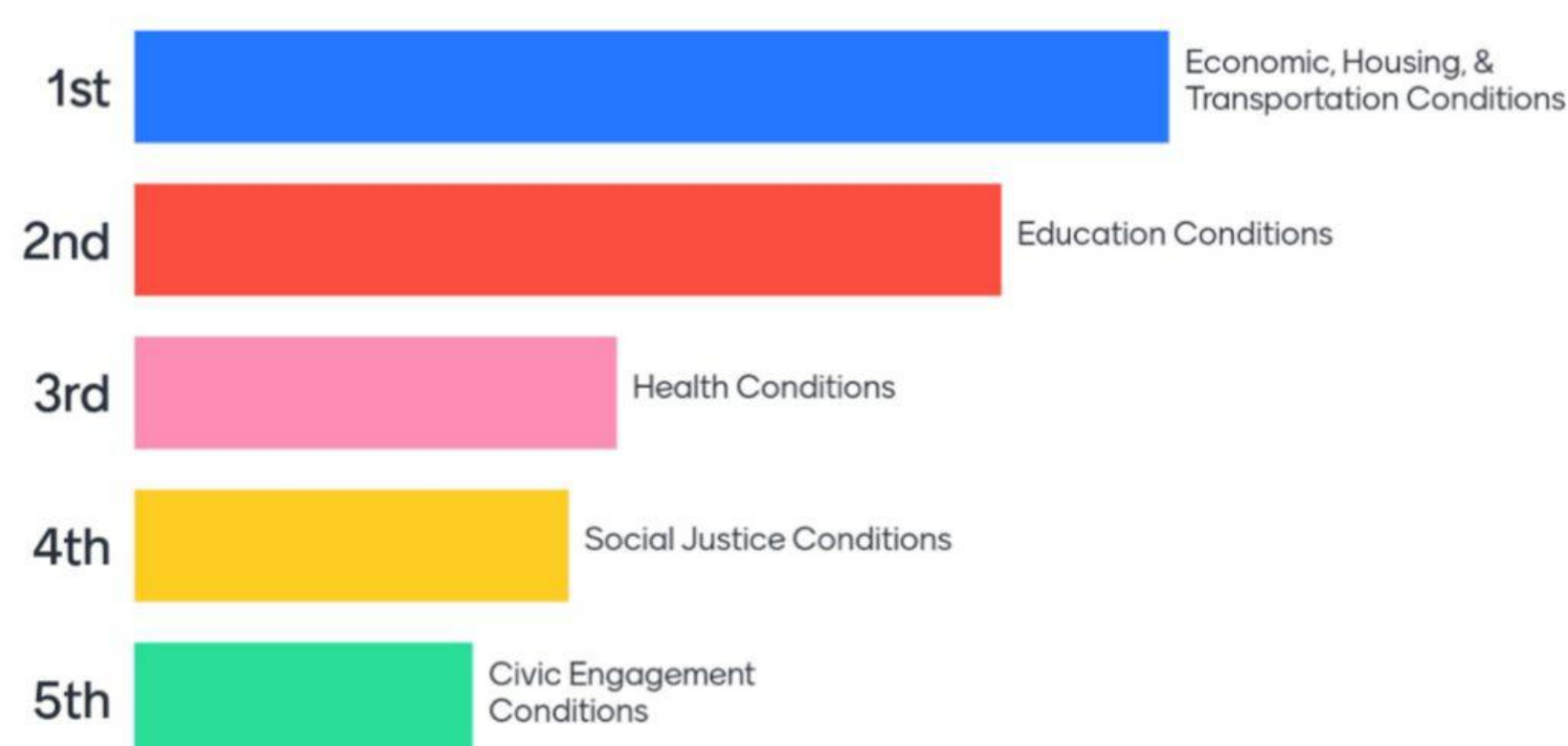
The participants noted the significant harm COVID-19 brought to the Albany metropolitan area – not only as a health crisis but also as a disruption to jobs, housing, and other indicators of well-being. They also cited the ongoing problem of formerly incarcerated individuals having difficulty finding jobs, leading to serious financial instability in Black communities burdened by over-policing and excessive sentencing. The residents suggested increased job training and entrepreneurship programs to improve the economic outlook of Metro Albany, along with Medicaid expansion as a solution to improve health outcomes.



# ALBANY MSA

At the end of the session, the participants ranked the top five focus areas as demonstrated in the graphic below.

## What is the most important issue facing the Albany Metropolitan Area?



## Key Highlights of Research Findings

The Albany MSA is located in the southwest region of Georgia. Anchored by the City of Albany, the Albany MSA comprises five counties, and is located in Georgia's Black Belt, a region known for fertile land and historical ties to cotton plantations and the Slave trade. As of the 2020 census, the MSA had a population of 147,431 of which 53.6% were Black for a total of 79,028. The city of Albany population was 69,048 of which 74.6% were Black. Of the total population below poverty in Albany, 48% are Black.

Current challenges facing residents in the Albany MSA include high rates of poverty, inadequate affordable housing, public safety, sidewalks being either non-existent or in disrepair, inadequate investments in economic development and workforce training, public transportation opportunities, and lack of support services for families near or below the poverty line. Opportunities for the Albany MSA include new developments around the metropolitan area that can be leveraged to advance Black business contracting and livable wage workforce training opportunities for the residents, in addition to opportunities to collaborate with anchor institutions in the region such as Albany State University, Proctor and Gamble, and Miller Brewing Company among other growing businesses in the region.

	Albany MSA	Data Interpretation
<b>Total Population</b>	53.6%	Black residents account for 53.6% of the Albany MSA.
<b>Below Poverty Rate</b>	71.7%	Of the total population below poverty in the Albany MSA, 71.7% are Black.
<b>Unemployment Rate</b>	12.20%	The Black unemployment rate in the Albany MSA is 12.2%
<b>Owner Occupied Households</b>	40.9%	Of the Black households in the Albany MSA, 40.9% were owner occupied.
<b>Population with no HS Degree</b>	18.1%	Of all Black people that are 25 years or older in the Albany MSA, 18.1% do not have a High School Degree.
<b>Infant Deaths</b>	80.0%	Of all infant deaths in the Albany MSA, 80% are Black.
<b>Does not have health insurance</b>	58%	Of the total population who are non-institutionalized and do not have health insurance in the Albany MSA, 58% are Black.
<b>Active Voters</b>	49.30%	Of all active voters in the Albany MSA, 49.3% are Black.

# ATLANTA MSA

On Thursday, September 8, 2022, and Friday, September 9, 2022, the Urban League of Greater Atlanta invited community members to our Atlanta office to participate in a community conversation on the Economic, Healthcare, Education, Social Justice, and Civic Engagement conditions facing those living and working in the Atlanta metropolitan area.

(Ebenezer Baptist Church)

## Highlights of the Atlanta Community Conversations

The metro Atlanta community conversations engaged community, civic leaders and elected officials from across the region in a dynamic discussion about the challenges and opportunities that exist with respect to the advancement of the Black community across metro Atlanta. Our conversations included interactive sessions, during which participants shared concerns about the sharp rise in residential rental costs by unregulated landlords, driving rents upwards of 50% of household income for unskilled workers. Further with the lack of affordable housing is pushing families into extended stay motels that are more expensive than monthly rent leading to increases in homelessness. Further, there was deep concern expressed about educational disparities between Black and White children with a focus on 3rd and 4th grade reading levels, and the negative impact hospital closures are having on the community.

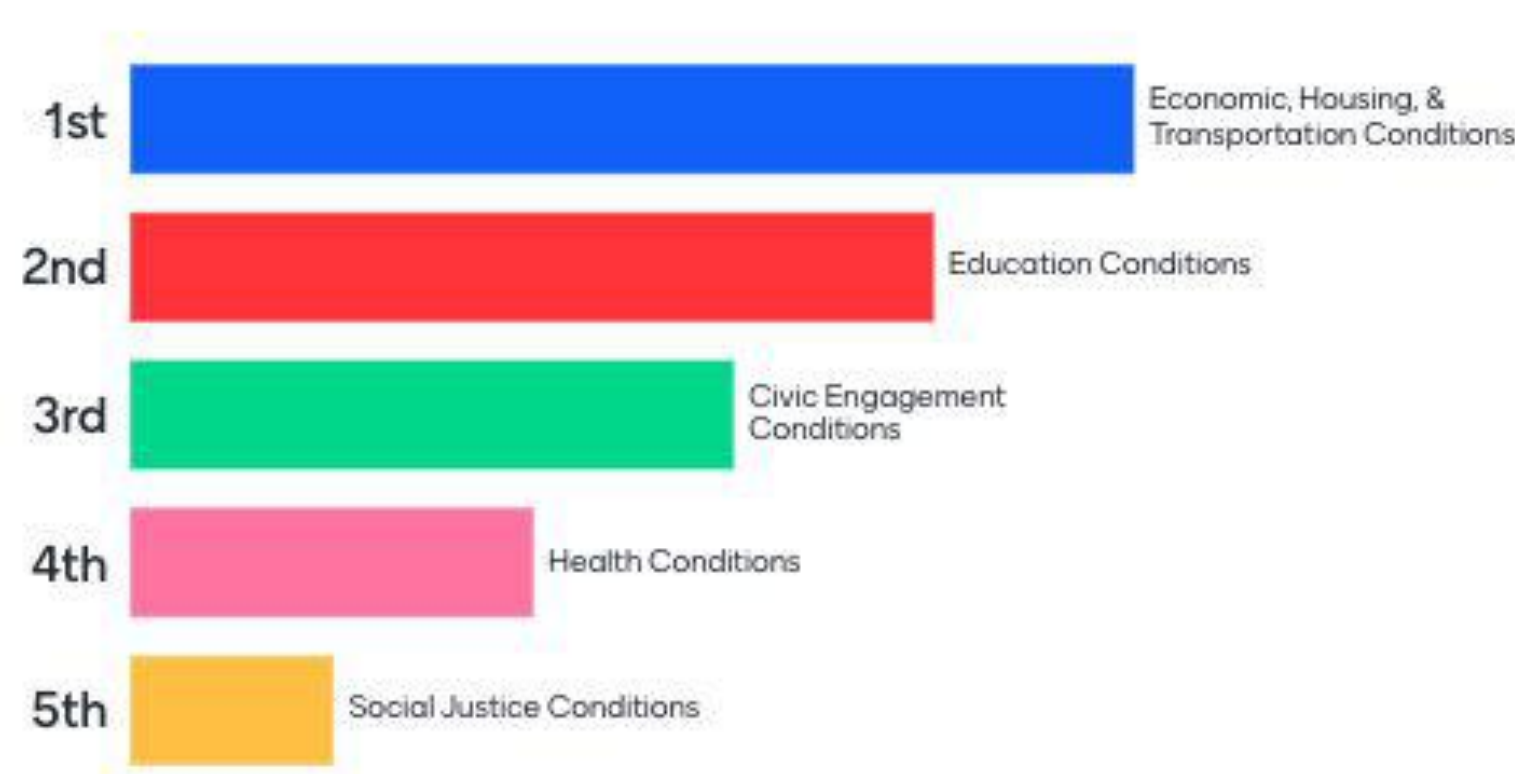
Participants also discussed campaign finance reform, and how running for office can be cost prohibitive for the average citizens, and they explored the role disparities in the criminal justice system play in limiting employment opportunities for previously incarcerated Black people across metro-Atlanta. The community members suggested increased investment in transit-oriented development, enhanced educational requirements for law enforcement, and increased teacher pay could improve the social and economic conditions for those living and working in metroAtlanta.



# ATLANTA MSA

During the sessions, participants ranked the most important issues facing the Atlanta metropolitan area. Economic conditions ranked highest, followed by education, civic engagement, health, and social justice.

## What is the most important issue facing the Atlanta Metropolitan Area?



The Atlanta MSA is located in the northwestern region of Georgia. Anchored by the City of Atlanta, the Atlanta MSA includes 29 counties, is the home of the Civil Rights movement, and is a major national and international hub for transportation, entertainment, and technology. The population of the Atlanta MSA according to the 2020 Census was 5,947,008 people of which 34.2% were Black totaling 2,033,158 people. Although Black residents make up nearly 34% of the Atlanta MSA population, 32% of the voting population, and 32% of the workforce, Black residents in metroAtlanta have an unemployment rate of 7.7%, which is nearly twice the unemployment rate for White residents in metro-Atlanta (3.8%). Furthermore, Black residents have a median income of approximately \$54,000, while White residents have a median income of approximately \$72,000.

Current challenges facing residents in the Atlanta MSA include a high rate of poverty with limited employment opportunities for unskilled youth and adults, lack of affordable housing, hospital closures and poor environmental quality that exacerbates poor health. Opportunities for the Atlanta MSA include preparing a new workforce for the growing tech and film/television sectors, developing affordable senior and workforce housing, and expanding logistics facilities near Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport.

	Atlanta MSA	Data Interpretation
<b>Total Population</b>	34.2%	Black residents account for 34.2% of the Atlanta MSA.
<b>Below Poverty Rate</b>	46.6%	Of the total population below poverty in the Atlanta MSA, 46.6% are Black.
<b>Unemployment Rate</b>	7.70%	The Black unemployment rate in the Atlanta MSA is 7.7%
<b>Owner Occupied Households</b>	48.80%	Of the Black households in the Atlanta MSA, 48.8% were owner occupied.
<b>Population with no HS Degree</b>	8.90%	Of all Black people that are 25 years or older in the Atlanta MSA, 8.9% do not have a High School Degree.
<b>Infant Deaths</b>	58.60%	Of all infant deaths in the Atlanta MSA, 58.6% are Black.
<b>Does not have health insurance</b>	35.00%	Of the total population who are non-institutionalized and do not have health insurance in the Atlanta MSA, 35% are Black.
<b>Active Voters</b>	32.20%	Of all active voters in the Atlanta MSA, 32.2% are Black.

# AUGUSTA MSA

On Friday, August 12, 2022, the Urban League of Greater Atlanta traveled to Augusta's Salvation Army Kroc Center to participate in a community conversation on the Economic, Healthcare, Education, Social Justice, and Civic Engagement conditions facing those living and working in the Augusta metropolitan area.

(Springfield Baptist Church)

## Highlights of the metro Augusta Community Conversations

The August community conversation engaged a diverse group of community stakeholders willing to share their perspectives on the needs and opportunities for change and impact on Black communities in the metro area. The dialogue focused on concerns regarding the underperforming public school system and low literacy, challenges with civic engagement, limited economic opportunities for livable wage employment, inadequate resources for underserved youth, and a lack of affordable housing.

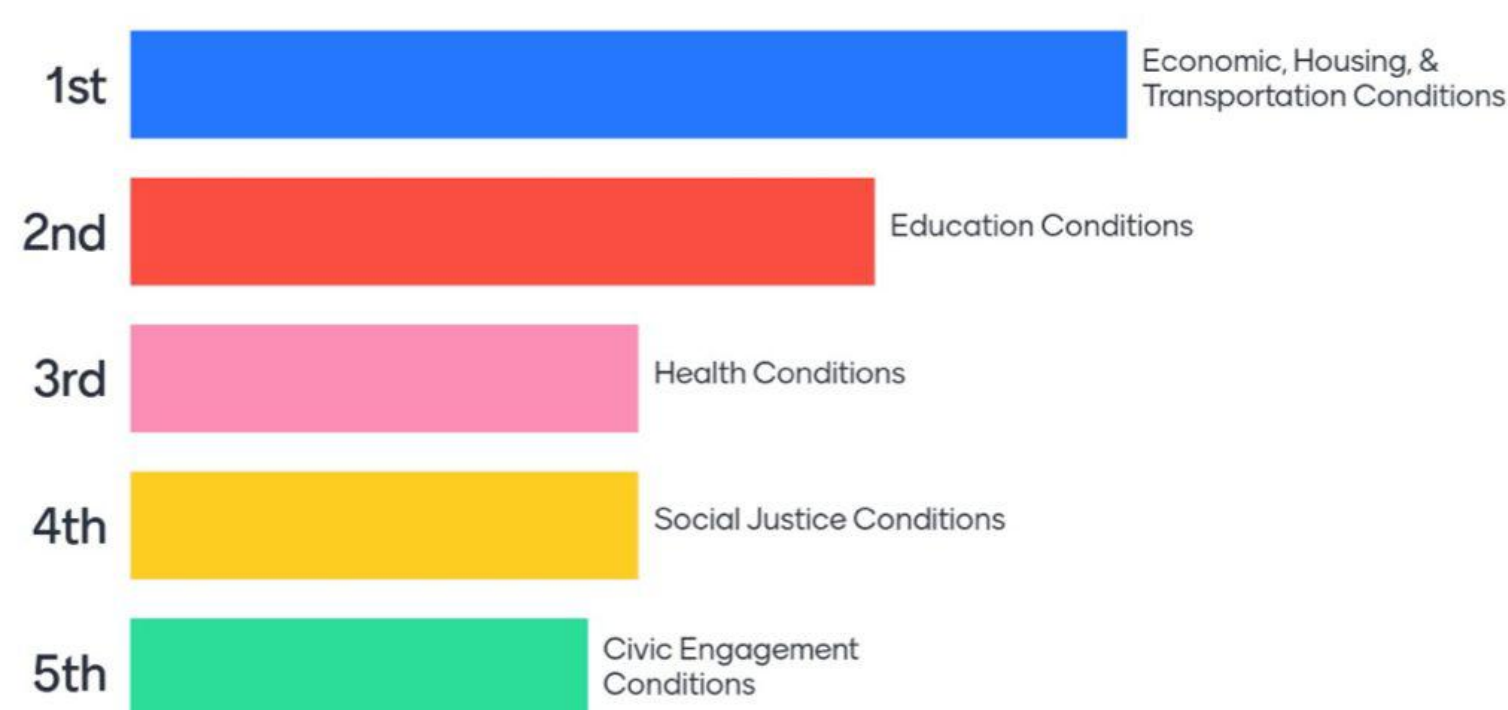
The participants also noted a need for an improved public transit system, inadequate healthcare access including EMT service, and a lack of job opportunities for those formerly incarcerated. The residents suggested increased cooperation with area colleges could improve civic engagement in the community and that development of a regional public transportation system could boost access to economic opportunities.



# AUGUSTA MSA

During the meeting, residents ranked the most important issues facing the Augusta metropolitan area. Economic conditions ranked highest, followed by education, health, social justice, and civic engagement.

## What is the most important issue facing the Augusta Metropolitan Area?



The Augusta MSA is located in eastern Georgia, straddling the Savannah River and the GA/SC border. Anchored by the City of Augusta, the Augusta MSA holds seven counties, and is home to both Fort Gordon Army Base and Paine College, a local Historically Black College. The population of the Augusta MSA is 605,303 with 35.3% of the population being Black totaling 213,636 people. The population of Augusta is 201,196 of which 57.47% of the population being Black totaling 115,627 people.

Though Black residents make up 35% of the Augusta MSA population and 33% of the voting population, they only make up 20% of the labor force and have an unemployment rate of 10%, which is double the unemployment rate of their White counterparts. They also have a median income over \$20,000 less than their White counterparts: Black residents in Augusta have a median income of \$41,000 vs. approximately \$63,000 for Whites. Furthermore, in Augusta only 17.8% of Black people are in owner-occupied households vs. 46% of Whites, and 28.3% are high-school graduates compared to approximately a 55% for Whites.

Current challenges facing residents in the Augusta MSA include a controversial City-County consolidation that has sparked concerns of some Black residents about diluted voting and economic power, and flooding along the Savannah River that especially harms predominantly Black neighborhoods. Opportunities include investments in HBCU Paine College, corporate expansions to increase cyber security jobs and livable wage careers pathways, investments in and around Paine College, and new buses and other improvements to public transportation.

	Augusta MSA	Data Interpretation
<b>Total Population</b>	35.3%	Black residents account for 35.3% of the Augusta MSA.
<b>Below Poverty Rate</b>	56.0%	Of the total population below poverty in the Augusta MSA, 56% are Black.
<b>Unemployment Rate</b>	10.00%	The Black unemployment rate in the Augusta MSA is 10%
<b>Owner Occupied Households</b>	52.20%	Of the Black households in the Augusta MSA, 52% were owner occupied.
<b>Population with no HS Degree</b>	15.80%	Of all Black people that are 25 years or older in the Augusta MSA, 15.8% do not have a High School Degree.
<b>Infant Deaths</b>	78.60%	Of all infant deaths in the Augusta MSA, 78.6% are Black.
<b>Does not have health insurance</b>	37.00%	Of the total population who are non-institutionalized and do not have health insurance in the Augusta MSA, 37% are Black.
<b>Active Voters</b>	32.90%	Of all active voters in the Augusta MSA, 32.9% are Black.

# COLUMBUS MSA

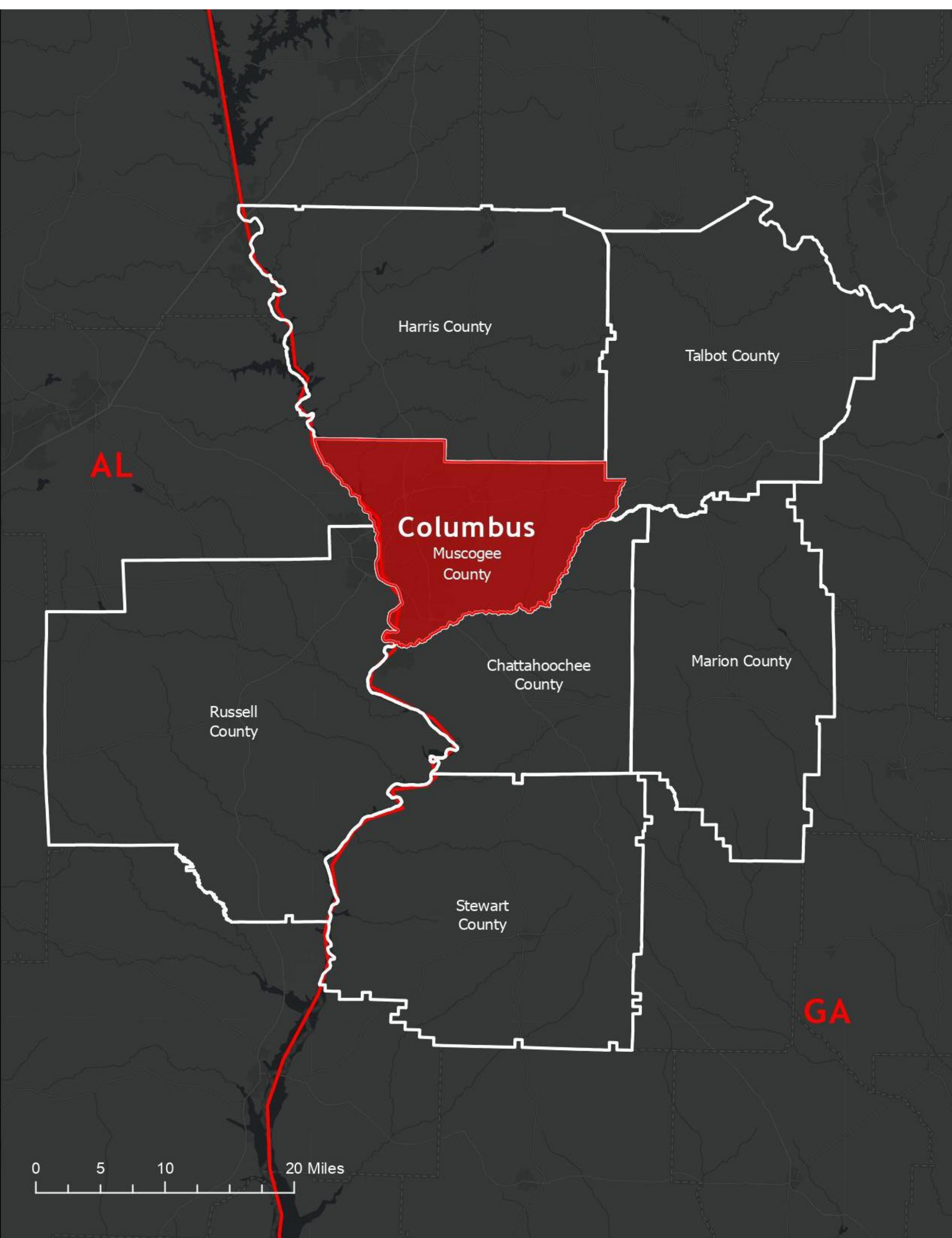
On Tuesday, June 29, 2022, the Urban League of Greater Atlanta traveled to Columbus to participate in a community conversation hosted by the Urban League of Greater Columbus.

(First African Baptist Church)

## Summary of the Community Conversation

The community conversation was held at the Green Island Country Club and was hosted by Tracey Mosley, Interim President of the Urban League of Greater Columbus. Over 40 diverse community leaders, comprised of elected officials, educators, faith-based leaders, entrepreneurs, and public and private sector professionals participated and shared their insights and viewpoints. Topics included discussion of preservation of historic poverty and under invested Black neighborhoods, the lack of affordable housing, and the need for local employers to pay a living wage. The participants also discussed the impact of Columbus being a consolidated city-county government and the relationship between racism, poverty, and mass incarceration.

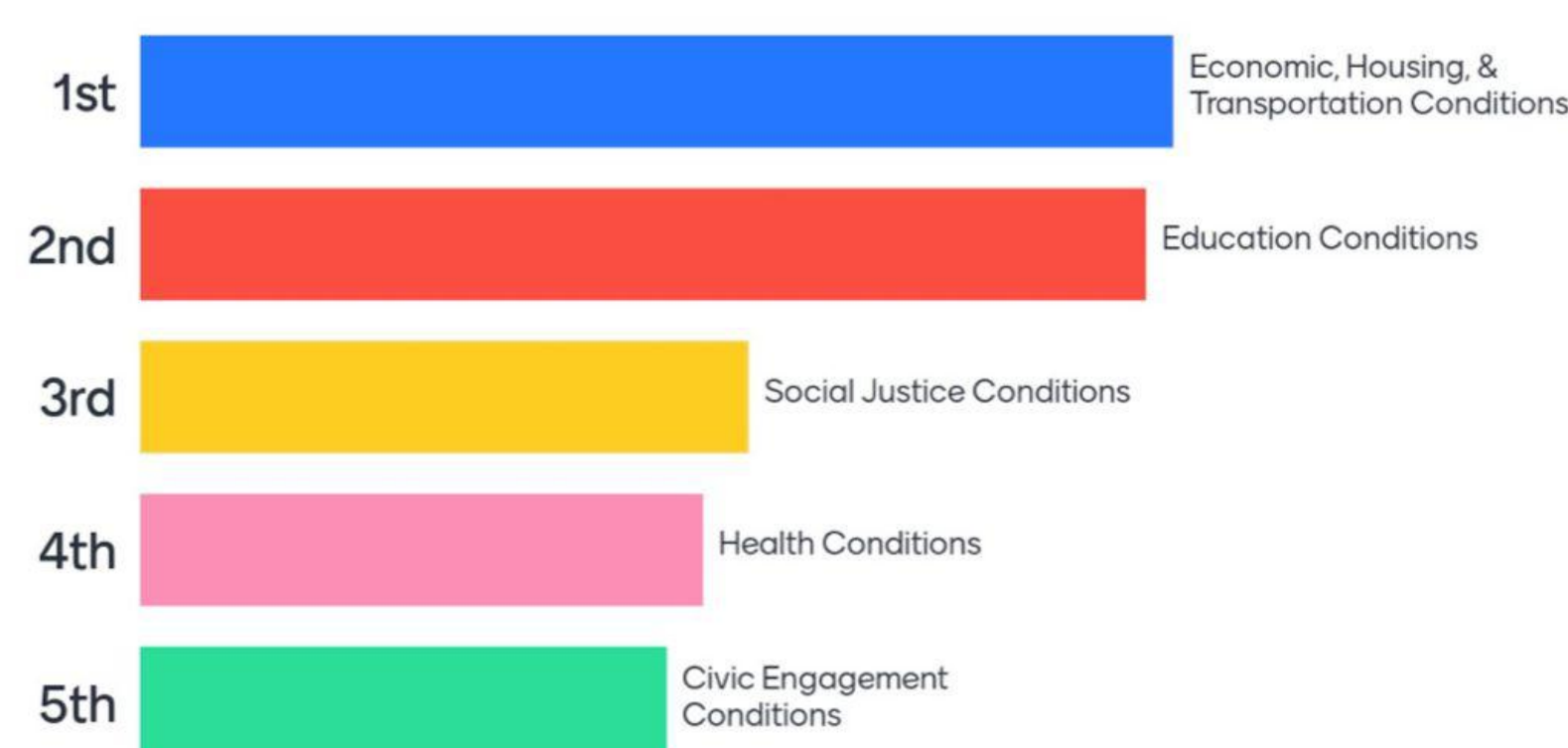
There were also concerns expressed about the need for more resources for returning citizens. Residents also suggested financial literacy training and more access to capital for Black business development is needed to facilitate entrepreneurship and homeownership. Access to public transportation was also discussed as a barrier with recommendations for expanding and adjusting bus schedules and routes as a means to providing residents in Black communities better access to better job opportunities.



# COLUMBUS MSA

At the conclusion of the community conversation, During the meeting, residents ranked the most important issues facing the Columbus metropolitan area. Economic conditions ranked highest, followed by education, social justice, health, and civic engagement.

## What is the most important issue facing the Columbus Metropolitan Area?



The Columbus, Georgia Metropolitan Statistical Area comprises six Georgia counties (Chattahoochee, Harris, Marion, Muscogee, Stewart and Talbot) and one county in Alabama (Russell). It is located in the southwest sector of the state along the Alabama border. The area is often referred to as the Chattahoochee Valley and the city of Columbus is the anchor city that is located along the Chattahoochee River. The population of the region is approximately 320,000 people of which 42% are Black and Columbus, Georgia is now the 2nd largest city in the state with a population of approximately 206,000 people of which approximately 47% are Black. The Columbus MSA is also home to Fort Benning, a military installation serving over 120,000 military personnel and civilians. As previously stated, Columbus is a consolidated city-county government.

Because of the growth and development of metro Columbus, the MSA ranks 4th in the state. While Columbus has grown economically and has begun to attract new businesses and investment, one of the greatest challenges for Blacks in the Columbus MSA is poverty. During the ten-year period that ended with the 2020 Census, poverty in Columbus remained relatively flat with the poverty rate in 2010 being 20.6% and ten years later the rate remaining at 20%. However, the state of Georgia's poverty rate for the same period also decreased from 17.9% to 14.3% over the same time frame, while the U.S. rate as a whole dropped from 15.3% down to 12.8%.

	Columbus MSA	Data Interpretation
<b>Total Population</b>	42.0%	Black residents account for 42% of the Columbus MSA.
<b>Below Poverty Rate</b>	59.1%	Of the total population below poverty in the Columbus MSA, 59.1% are Black.
<b>Unemployment Rate</b>	9.6%	The Black unemployment rate in the Columbus MSA is 9.6%
<b>Owner Occupied Households</b>	47.00%	Of the Black households in the Columbus MSA, 47% were owner occupied.
<b>Population with no HS Degree</b>	15.50%	Of all Black people that are 25 years or older in the Columbus MSA, 15.5% do not have a High School Degree.
<b>Infant Deaths</b>	69.0%	Of all infant deaths in the Columbus MSA, 69% are Black.
<b>Does not have health insurance</b>	49.0%	Of the total population who are non-institutionalized and do not have health insurance in the Columbus MSA, 49% are Black.
<b>Active Voters</b>	41.40%	Of all active voters in the Columbus MSA, 41.4% are Black.



# MACON MSA

On Monday, June 13, 2022, the Urban League of Greater Atlanta traveled to Macon’s Union Baptist Church to participate in a community conversation on the Economic, Healthcare, Education, Social Justice, and Civic Engagement conditions facing those living and working in the Macon metropolitan area.

(First Baptist Church of Christ)

## Summary of the Community Conversation

The Macon metro area community conversation engaged elected officials, educators, business leaders and non-profits to discuss the needs and conditions across metro Macon and the impact on Black residents. Our conversation included an interactive session, where participants discussed such challenges as a lack of private sector investment in the community, the negative impact of the crime rate on the economy, and inadequate public transit options. The participants also noted that many residents did not have access to health insurance or healthcare, which further exacerbates challenges due to chronic disease and pre-existing conditions. Additionally, community members discussed the negative impacts of City-County consolidation, and how that has led to diminished economic and political power for Macon’s Black community.

There were also concerns about crime, public education and persistent poverty and the need for affordable housing and expanded programs and services for youth and young adults.



# MACON MSA

During the meeting, residents ranked the most important issues facing the Macon metropolitan area. Education ranked highest, followed by civic engagement, social justice, economic, and health issues.

## What is the most important issue facing the Macon Metropolitan Area?



The Macon MSA is located in central Georgia on the Ocmulgee River, approximately 90 minutes southeast of Atlanta, and 2.5 hours northwest of Savannah. Anchored by the City of Macon, the Macon MSA comprises five counties, and is home to Mercer University and Central GA Technical College. The population of the Macon MSA is 229,565 and 44.6% of the population is Black. The population of Macon is 157,346 of which 54.28% are Black. Of the total population below poverty in Macon, 40% are black.

Though Black residents make up approximately 45% of the Macon MSA population and 45% of the voting population, they only make up 41% of the labor force and have an unemployment rate of 9.1%, which is over twice the White unemployment rate of 4.6%. Black residents have a median income approximately \$20,000 less than their White counterparts: the median income for Black residents is \$37,000 vs. approximately \$59,000 for Whites. Furthermore, when exploring dropout rates, we see that 54% of Macon's high school dropouts are Black.

Current challenges facing residents in the Macon MSA include City-County consolidation, which has diluted the political power of Macon residents, violent crime rife among the community's youth, and lack of economic development in Black communities. Opportunities for the Macon MSA include expanded employment at recently announced manufacturing facilities, aerospace companies, and the runway extension of Middle GA Regional Airport.

	Macon MSA	Data Interpretation
<b>Total Population</b>	44.6%	Black residents account for 44.6% of the Macon MSA.
<b>Below Poverty Rate</b>	63.3%	Of the total population below poverty in the Macon MSA, 63.3% are Black.
<b>Unemployment Rate</b>	9.10%	The Black unemployment rate in the Macon MSA is 9.1%
<b>Owner Occupied Households</b>	44.10%	Of the Black households in the Macon MSA, 44.1% were owner occupied.
<b>Population with no HS Degree</b>	17.10%	Of all Black people that are 25 years or older in the Macon MSA, 17.1% do not have a High School Degree.
<b>Infant Deaths</b>	76.00%	Of all infant deaths in the Macon MSA, 76% are Black.
<b>Does not have health insurance</b>	49.00%	Of the total population who are non-institutionalized and do not have health insurance in the Macon MSA, 49% are Black.
<b>Active Voters</b>	44.70%	Of all active voters in the Macon MSA, 44.7% are Black.

# SAVANNAH MSA

On Tuesday, June 21, 2022, the Urban League of Greater Atlanta traveled to Savannah's historic First African Baptist Church to participate in a community conversation on the Economic, Healthcare, Education, Social Justice, and Civic Engagement conditions facing those living and working in the Savannah metropolitan area.

(First African Baptist Church)

## Summary of the Community Conversation

The community conversation in Savannah reflected a diverse group of leaders from across the city-county region that included diverse educators, members of the business community, elected officials, community based organizations, and civic leaders. Participants cited challenges such as persistent poverty driven by unskilled labor relegated to low wage employment, rising costs of housing and inadequate supply, concerns that officials were more interested in serving SCAD (Savannah College of Art and Design) and tourists than serving the local community. Residents also expressed they want more investments Savannah State University - one of ten HBCUs in the state.

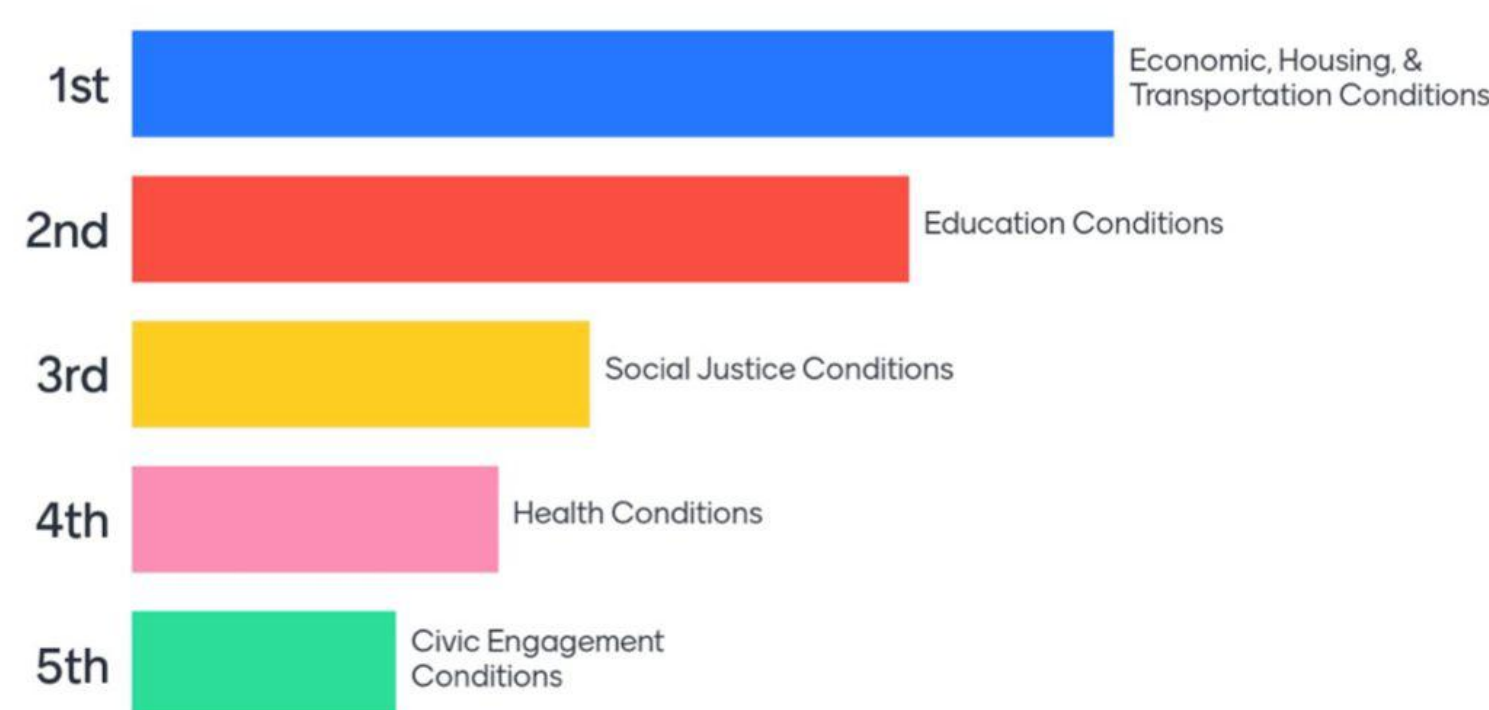
We also discussed the recently released [GA Systemic Change Alliance Savannah Report](#) by the Racial Equity and Leadership Task Force, which provides policy recommendations to promote Economic Empowerment and Development, Education, Environmental Justice, Health, and Housing as symbol of progress and collaboration across communities and sectors that reflects opportunities for systemic change and progress. Concerns were also expressed about the limited access to the economic opportunities the Port of Savannah represents sharing residents have expressed challenges securing access to the livable wage employment and small business opportunities when Georgia ports generate 561,081 full and part-time jobs. The Savannah Chamber of Commerce reports that Georgia's deep water ports and inland barge terminals support nearly 500,000 jobs throughout the state annually and contribute \$29 billion in income, \$122 billion in sales, and \$3.4 billion in state and local taxes to Georgia's economy.



# SAVANNAH MSA

During the meeting, residents ranked the most important issues facing the Savannah metropolitan area. Economic conditions ranked highest, followed by education, social justice, health, and civic engagement.

## What is the most important issue facing the Savannah Metropolitan Area?



The Savannah MSA is located in the southwestern Georgia on the Savannah River. Anchored by the City of Savannah, the Savannah MSA comprises three counties, and is home to numerous historical sites, Savannah College of Art and Design, and First African Baptist Church, the oldest Black church in North America. The total population of the Savannah MSA is 390,211 of which 33.5% are Black, totaling 130,671 people. The population of Savannah is 147,088 of which 52.3% is Black. Of the total population living in poverty in metro Savannah, 51.2% are Black.

Though Black residents make up approximately 33% of the Savannah MSA population and 29% of the voting population, they make up 31% of the labor force and have an unemployment rate of 10.3%, which is over twice the White unemployment rate of 5%. They also have a median income nearly \$25,000 less than their White counterparts: Black residents in Savannah have a median income of \$50,000 vs. approximately \$74,000 for Whites.

Current challenges include persistent poverty, spatial mismatches between job centers and where Black residents live, and equitable investments in Black neighborhoods. Opportunities for the Savannah MSA include the billion-dollar expansion of the Savannah port, which is projected to bring well-paying jobs and resources to the broader community.

	Savannah MSA	Data Interpretation
<b>Total Population</b>	33.5%	Black residents account for 33.5% of the Savannah MSA.
<b>Below Poverty Rate</b>	51.2%	Of the total population below poverty in the Savannah MSA, 51.2% are Black.
<b>Unemployment Rate</b>	10.30%	The Black unemployment rate in the Savannah MSA is 10.3%
<b>Owner Occupied Households</b>	45.40%	Of the Black households in the Savannah MSA, 45.4% were owner occupied.
<b>Population with no HS Degree</b>	13.20%	Of all Black people that are 25 years or older in the Savannah MSA, 13.2% do not have a High School Degree.
<b>Infant Deaths</b>	61.50%	Of all infant deaths in the Savannah MSA, 61.5% are Black.
<b>Does not have health insurance</b>	37.00%	Of the total population who are non-institutionalized and do not have health insurance in the Savannah MSA, 37% are Black.
<b>Active Voters</b>	29.20%	Of all active voters in the Savannah MSA, 29.2% are Black.



State of Black Georgia

# Regional Essays



# Achieving equity and justice requires targeted focus

By Nigel Walton

Regional Essays / Albany

During the 1960s, Albany, Georgia, was the major focus of national news as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the National Association for the Advancement Colored People (NAACP), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and a host of other civil rights organizations sought to dismantle legal segregation. Because of the strategy of Laurie Pritchett, the Albany Police Chief, the protest in the city was stifled, and leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. were arrested. After his release, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. suggested that the protest would have been successful if the stakeholders had focused on a particular avenue of desegregation.

The key to success for Albany's movement then, and the success of the Black community in Georgia now, can be found in focusing on not every problem "under the sun." Today, to reach our goals, I believe we must choose two major issues: **economic growth and workforce development.**

Economic growth succeeds for the entire community when we bring in the right businesses that fit the culture. For Black citizens to compete in a global economy, I suggest that we promote major investments in three industries: **transportation, agriculture, and healthcare.**

**Transportation** is one of the prime industries in Georgia. Delta, UPS, and KIA are just some of the transportation companies that call Georgia home. These companies bring hundreds of jobs to Georgia, but there is no global transportation company that manufactures in Albany or calls our city home. Albany must invest in huge capital projects focused on transportation. Our city needs to attract companies with a focus on technology. These companies will not only bring jobs, but they will reinforce commercial and residential development.

**Agriculture is a key industry** in Albany, but Black and other low-income farmers are not profiting equitably. Bringing in "agritech" companies can put Albany on the map. With the rural population decreasing, these "agritech" companies can show technologies that protect and develop a much-needed environment for farmers. There should be a partnership with several research universities and the City of Albany to improve the agricultural industry in the 21st century to put us ahead of our competitor states around us. This partnership should prioritize engaging the Black community in the agricultural industry in an equitable way to ensure shared profit from this multi-billion-dollar industry.

**Healthcare access** is one of the most pivotal topics in American politics. As more and more US citizens have preexisting conditions, it is imperative that healthcare agencies focus on preventive healthcare. Preventive healthcare will save money and lives by decreasing the numbers of people who fill emergency rooms and doctors' offices because of unhealthy habits and poor access to routine medical attention. Furthermore, Phoebe Putney Memorial Hospital must increase the provision of quality healthcare services and outreach in Black communities.

**Workforce development** also is a pressing issue for Albany. When the next generation of talented young people leaves Albany seeking better opportunities, we will face a critical leadership and professional services gap that will affect the entire city. Imagine the problem if there are no Black lawyers, engineers, bankers, plumbers, electricians, IT experts, and entrepreneurs?

**Albany needs strategic improvement in transportation, healthcare, and career development.**

**The Dougherty County School System must take the lead** in reinforcing high-demand careers while working in collaboration with the Albany-Dougherty County Economic Development Commission to make sure Albany can compete for our home-grown talent. I believe this can be done in three ways:

- Provide tax incentives for graduates of Albany State University and Albany Technical College to buy their first home in Albany.
- Engage employers from target sectors - technology, transportation, healthcare, and agriculture - and identify their specific workforce needs.
- Invest in the technological advancements that expand job opportunities. There is no way that Albany can improve its workforce without the proper investments in technology in K-12 schools, colleges, and other workforce development programs.

If we take these steps, we will have followed the sage advice of Dr. King by concentrating our power where we can make the most sustainable and effective change. By promoting economic growth and workforce development in communities of color, we can secure the future for the entire city and create a model for the state and the nation.

## Nigel Walton

Public Policy | Georgia State '22  
President | Collegiate 100



*By promoting economic growth and workforce development in communities of color, we can secure the future for the entire city and create a model for the state and the nation.*



# Black to a Green Future: The Role of Climate Justice in Realizing Black Liberation

By Nathaniel Smith

Regional Essays / Atlanta

Established over 11 years ago to address the pervasive racial inequities harming our people daily in the American South, Partnership for Southern Equity targets four issue areas to advance racial equity: health, opportunity, growth, and energy. We understand the intersectionality of racial injustice in each of these areas. Therefore, we pursue policies and programs capable of systemic disruption and healing, while advancing innovative equitable alternatives to the prevailing status quo.

This is especially true within the sustainability and climate change spaces. Whatever transformation we aspire to achieve, we cannot get there in an environmental ecosystem that causes collective trauma and infirmities. At PSE we believe that many of the solutions required to liberate our communities are found in our past (and current) relationship with our natural environment.

As stated in the title, we need to go **Black to a green future**. A “values revolution” must take place in Georgia where Black people prioritize healing our environment by working collectively with our allies to disrupt the destructive nature of white oppression infecting our current economy. We must advocate for a new energy economy that benefits all people and all communities.







## Historically, our people have aligned with nature

To start, let’s acknowledge and honor our history as the first environmentalists. African civilizations communed with nature, created societies aligned with their ecosystems, and possessed a vast repository of knowledge about the land before other expressions of humanity were on this planet. This respect for nature and knowledge of the Earth traveled across the Atlantic Ocean and found refuge throughout the Americas and Caribbean.

It is unequivocally false to assume that environment and climate are non-traditional Black issues. We are part of an economy based on extreme extraction, White oppression, and structural racism. The energy of enslaved people was usurped to build Georgia before the use of electricity was mastered. Although we are legally free today, the maximization of profit is still the modus operandi driving the exploitation of our labor and land. Every day, Black people and other historically marginalized communities fight to ensure that water, air, land, and energy are clean, accessible, and sustainable. The movement is not solely about civil rights, equality, or parity, it is about changing the conditions of our lived experiences equitably where both our people and planet are liberated from the current toxic world view.



## The future of our people and planet are inextricably linked:

-  Communities of color breathe in 40% more polluted air than White communities across the United States.
-  People of color nationally are 38% more likely to be exposed to asthma-causing pollutants.
-  African Americans are 75% more likely than others to live near facilities producing hazardous waste.
-  Nationally, African American households experience a median energy burden 64% greater than White households.
-  According to the Century Foundation, “neighborhoods with large non-White populations have historically seen lower property values, meaning that land in those areas is cheaper for industrial actors to acquire – leading to greater pollution.”
-  According to a report published by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, “urban flooding. . . is most harmful to minorities, low-income residents, and others without the resources to handle the damage and disruption.”

### How did we get here and how do we effect change?







These outcomes are not happenstance. Decisions were made - and are still being adopted -- by people in power who benefit from extreme extraction to the detriment of Black people. From Flint, Michigan, to Jackson, Mississippi, basic access to water is under siege. Ignoring the ever-present signs of climate change, the state of Mississippi did nothing to compensate for the severe storms that flooded the Pearl River, which eventually overwhelmed the city of Jackson’s water treatment plant. Now, 150,000 people do not have safe drinking water. Again, a series of decisions to maintain the historic systems of oppression, as it pertains to our environment, have left a whole city in crisis.

In his 1967 book, *Where Do We Go from Here? Chaos or Community?*, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. posed a crucial question regarding ending poverty and the need for better jobs, higher wages, decent housing, and quality education. We, too, pose that question, highlighting the urgency of concern for our environment. How do we advance economically, politically, socially, and educationally without substantively addressing environmental conditions predicated on values and reinforced by systems founded on our devaluation as people?

The change we seek exists within us. Black people must prioritize environmental and climate justice as key pathways to shared prosperity. We need a Green Liberation Agenda for Black people in Georgia and beyond.

At Partnership for Southern Equity, we work with communities and other frontline organizations to fundamentally change the values guiding our economy by pursuing policies and programs where Black people are seen, heard, respected, and leading the clean energy revolution.

## Some examples of PSE in action include:

-  Establishing the Just Energy Circle where 40-50 organizations convene to develop strategies for systems disruption and growing a regenerative economy.
-  Through funding from the MacArthur Foundation, PSE has hosted four Just Energy Academies where frontline organizations establish a deeper understanding of environmental justice through the lens of racial equity.
-  Leading a study, funded by the Kresge Foundation, on the correlation between climate change and health equity in the westside of Atlanta.
-  Leveraging funding from the NBA Foundation to create a pipeline for Black and Brown people to enter the green economy as skilled professionals and/or entrepreneurs.
-  Working with state legislators to center Historically Black Colleges and Universities as catalysts for a green liberation movement towards cleaner energy, more accessible energy, and greater diversity in the green economy sector.
-  Leading a national effort to capitalize on President Joe Biden's Justice 40 Executive Order by offering frontline organizations funding, technical assistance, resources, and community. This effort, the Justice 40 Accelerator, has served over 100 organizations who collectively have an 80% success rate in securing federal funding.

Although thankful for what we have accomplished, there is still so much left to do. Any chance to create a new, sustainable, equitable, people-centered economy, where the environment and Black genius are leveraged as an asset for collective benefit, requires Black people to reclaim their history as the first stewards of our planet. Time is of the essence.

The federal government continues to infuse state and local governments with funding from the American Rescue Plan Act, Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, and Inflation Reduction Act. Growing our economy requires preserving our environment. Fully realizing the benefits of these laws requires developing a strategy capable of shifting the paradigm where all people can realize their American Dream.

### Nathaniel Smith

Founder and Chief Equity Officer  
Partnership for Southern Equity



**Partnership for Southern Equity** is ready to stand in solidarity with other Georgians who believe, as we do, that our environment, our health, and our well-being are not for sale. Black to a green future is the only path forward, together.



# On Criminal Justice Reform, Dream but Don't Sleep

By Jared T. Williams

Regional Essays / Augusta

Black America stands at a most important crossroads in criminal justice. Georgia is ground zero. The dream of a criminal justice system that delivers on its promise of safety and fair treatment is right at our fingertips, but we cannot sleep if that dream is to become a reality.

Historically, the relationship between Black America and criminal justice has been an abusive, one-sided affair. But in the wake of unspeakable atrocities by police and prosecutors both locally and across the nation, broadcast to a world forced inside and glued to screens, Black America and Black Georgia simultaneously took a crucial step toward taking that power and wielding it for all America's good. Mothers stood up for their babies, bystanders became activists, and voters started paying more attention to their local prosecutors. The result was nothing short of revolution.

The year 2020 saw a historic upheaval of District Attorneys in the state, with the highest number ever of incumbent DAs being unseated. Most of these former top prosecutors were replaced by Black women and men with vast and varied experience; not just legal experience, but life experience in dealing with our system and its effect on communities of color. Black District Attorneys now sit in the most powerful seats in Georgia, including the Atlanta metro, Augusta, Columbus, Macon, and Savannah areas.

Most of these DAs are progressive minded, understanding the need for dignity-based and data-driven approaches to public safety, eschewing the incongruously dubbed “tough on crime” policies that have failed to make people safer. Calls for systemic reforms and alternatives to traditional sentencing have come from these offices. We now have DAs leading the charge for conviction integrity, prosecutor accountability, and policing reforms. If America is being ushered into a new era of criminal justice, Georgia is leading the way.

Black Georgia must not rest on the laurels of this progress, as the true work now begins. Fear of change has led the traditional power structure in the state to lash out. Bad faith actors thrive on the destructive policies of the war on drugs, mass incarceration, and the criminalization of our youth. They demand the status quo remain, and assail any prosecutor, activist, or policymaker who dares challenge it.

For those opposing reforms, the system does exactly what it was designed to do. A first-time felon is more likely to leave prison with a gang affiliation and trauma history than an education or skilled trade. Many courtrooms still prescribe prison for substance use disorder, locking up the addict rather than treating the addiction.

*At a time when behavioral health needs are at their highest, police and jails remain the primary mental health response in our communities. Georgia remains one of only three states in the union that still treats 17-year-olds as adults in criminal court, meaning a high school student can be branded a felon and disenfranchised a full a year before he is even old enough to vote!*

## ***Vigilance against losing ground is a key to progress***

Black Georgia, we cannot sleep on this opportunity. Voting is a critical tool, but elections alone cannot fix the generational problems of a defunct system. Traditional power structures use connections with the media to promote an image of lawlessness. They blame the new approaches of visionary DAs for long preexisting crime problems, rather than acknowledging the decades of harm caused by failed policies and refusal to provide for the communities most in need. They use lack of education about the criminal justice system to hide the true cause and effect of taking generations of men and women out of their communities for nonviolent offenses.

We must not sleep because those who seek to turn back the tides of progress have already begun their work. They seek prosecutor oversight in the state legislature, not to correct the history of wrongdoing by prosecutors, but rather to wield as a political sword. The purpose is to strip reform-minded DAs of their offices for using discretion in not charging marijuana cases or mothers seeking reproductive care. This tactic should simultaneously encourage and terrify Black Georgia, as it is both a recognition that our strength cannot be matched at the ballot box, and a declaration of war against the democratic process to strip communities of their right to choose their representation.

## ***Making the dream a reality***

We know where we must go. How do we get there? If elections alone are insufficient, if activism in a vacuum cannot make lasting change, and if the traditional powers are so stacked against us, how do we achieve our dual goals of a safer community and a safer system of justice?

In *Locking Up Our Own*, James Forman's revelatory work exposes how Black America often called for more police and stricter policy, but only as a single item on a menu of requested investments in safety. We requested better access to healthcare, to include mental health, greater investment in education, and better access to economic opportunity. Instead, the waiters served up militarized police, mandatory minimums, and mass incarceration.

## **Jared T. Williams**

District Attorney  
Augusta Judicial Circuit



We stand now with the benefit of hindsight, empowered with the knowledge of how damaging “tough on crime” policies have been to communities, how woefully ill-equipped the criminal justice system is at addressing certain ills, and how interconnected our safety is to our education, health, and economic well-being. Armed with this knowledge, emboldened by electoral successes, and organized around a central unifying goal, Black Georgia has never been better positioned to make systemic change a reality.

Black Georgia and our allies must demand systemic policy change and not settle for less. We must arm ourselves with knowledge, support candidates and leaders who will be accountable and unwavering in the face of challenge, and steel our resolve to create a new era in criminal justice. One that is fair. One that is just. One that works.

***The dream is now so close to reality. If we sleep, we will miss it.***



# Columbus, a story of promising potential

By Tracey R. Mosley

Regional Essays / Columbus

## Columbus is the economic engine for the region

Columbus, Georgia, lies on the banks of the Chattahoochee River neighboring the “Home of The Infantry,” Fort Benning, a United States Army post straddling the Alabama-Georgia border. With an estimated population of 210,295 residents, Columbus is home to many regional, national, and international employers that have helped transform a former mill town into the second largest city in Georgia. They include the international headquarters of Fortune 500 supplemental health insurer AFLAC, payments processing giant TSYS (a global payments company), Synovus, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Georgia, Pratt & Whitney, Realtree, Char-Broil, Hostess Brands, Kodak, NCR, and Snyder’s-Lance. Our community, consisting of over 20 surrounding counties, is often referred to as The Chattahoochee Valley. More than half of those coming to working in our area are between the ages of 25-44.

Fort Benning has been both a friend and an integral part of the Chattahoochee Valley for more than 100 years. Over 125,000 people in the Chattahoochee Valley have a connection to Fort Benning, either as soldiers, retirees, contractors, or civilians. Fort Benning is the third largest employer in Georgia with over 45,000 soldiers and civilians working on the installation. The economic impact to the bi-state area is \$4.75 billion per year.

As Columbus transitioned from a former mill town to its current role, incomes rose with the influx of white-collar jobs and opportunities. But not everyone in our community benefitted. Small businesses and Fortune 500 corporations have added to the overall growth of the middle class, including the Black middle class. Yet despite that, the median income for Black families in Columbus is \$33,839 as compared to \$47,418 overall, according to city-data.com. Clearly, the city is missing the mark in preparing every able resident to step into high-demand, high-income fields, to share in the bounty the employers offer.

The Black population in Columbus comprises 47.1% of residents while Whites make up 39.5% of the population. As is true in many cities, more Black people live in the south areas of the city. People who identify as White are most likely to live in the city’s northwest regions. These two areas show marked differences, with the south side suffering the effects of decades of disinvestment typical of Black urban communities around the nation.

# Founding of the Urban League of Greater Columbus

Since 1971, The Urban League of Greater Columbus, formerly known as The Metro Columbus Urban League, has been working to make a positive difference in the Chattahoochee Valley area. Our Urban League affiliate was born out of the seeds of discontent, and the subsequent attempt at reconciliation, following a series of fights and fire bombings in the summer of 1971. The unrest had racial underpinnings. Then-Mayor J.R. Allen and then-Governor Jimmy Carter sought to take actions that would not only strike at the heart of the racial tensions, but also be acceptable to both the White and Black communities.

The end product was the formation of a bi-racial committee comprised of 13 citizens representing a cross section of Columbus in terms of race, gender, and age. The committee was asked to develop a sound and functional strategy to foster greater communication between the Black and White communities. It ultimately recommended that an Urban League affiliate come to Columbus. The League remains central to the collaborative efforts of the city public-private partnerships.

We work to advance equity and civil rights for communities of color through five tenets of empowerment: 1) Workforce Development; 2) Entrepreneurship; 3) Financial, Wealth Building, and Homeownership; 4) Urban Youth and Young Adult engagement, and 5) Civic Engagement and Healthy Living.

The League has formed strategic alliances and partnerships with law enforcement, government officials, business leaders, and a range of civic and community organizations. Over the years, we have identified problems and developed approaches together to improve opportunities for residents throughout the region.



# Working to lower violence & elevate unity in the Greater Columbus area

According to Wane Hailes, editor and publisher of the city's African American and Latino newspaper, The Courier Eco Latino, "The number of registered and active Black voters in Muscogee County sends a message loud and clear that we are a demographic to be recognized and respected, and it is time to be treated as such."

Our continued collaboration within the community and with law enforcement is critical if we are to succeed in lowering violence and elevating unity in Greater Columbus. Our work is cut out for us. Here, gun deaths in 2021 far outpaced prior years. And 2022 has seen an alarming number of gunshot victims, ranging from age 17 to 71, who were either targeted or caught in the crossfire. As a response to gun violence, we at the Greater Columbus Urban League have inaugurated anti-violence initiatives aimed at engaging young people via education and career advancement opportunities.

Yet, we know that changing laws and practices in any aspect of the city, particularly as it relates to public safety, requires political clout. Our voices must be heard at the polls through our votes. The number of Black registered voters is encouraging. And our Get Out The Vote (GOTV) initiatives calling for educating and registering voters, in addition to offering free rides to the polls and encouraging early voting, has been well received.



**Tracey  
Mosley**

Interim President/CEO  
Urban League of Columbus



As we did 50 years ago when the Urban League was born in Columbus, we urge all leaders in our city - of every race -- to come together again, united to find solutions that will result in better lives for all residents of Greater Columbus, with an emphasis on communities that have been isolated from advancement. Now, as then, the Urban League embraces the potential and the promise to inspire sustainable change throughout the Chattahoochee Valley area.

# A call for Policy Solutions to address local, state, and national racial gaps

By Rev. Dr. James Louis Bumpus and Mrs. Renee' Hope Bumpus

Regional Essays / **Macon**

Leaders in the religious, civic, community, business, and education sectors have joined together in Middle Georgia to push for public-private actions to promote thriving neighborhoods. In recent years we have been continuously disappointed by the decline of advancement for people of color in Middle Georgia and the lack of public-private partnerships to prioritize and effect change.

The national and local attacks on fundamental and constitutional rights, such as attacks on personal privacy, health care, and personal freedom, are collectively debilitating. These rights, in some cases, are being upturned by a weaponized Supreme Court, threatening our nation's concept of democracy. Given this, we must have public policies that support and foster human dignity, human welfare, and human well-being. Policy must supersede politics and cultic human personality.

As leaders in the Macon metropolitan area, we believe a few policy shifts could be of major benefit to the Black community and to the entire area. These would include policies that guarantee the expansion of Medicare and Medicaid to ensure at least 500,000 more Georgians have access to healthcare; offer greater accessibility to healthcare providers; and ensure voting rights are protected for all Georgia citizens.

When it comes to Disadvantaged Business Enterprises, we believe that our local and state leadership should take further steps to ensure infrastructure projects include DBE utilization goals of 30% or greater while also increasing access to DBE and other small business owners. And we need to ensure that our state's rural and mid-sized cities have reliable broadband internet access, particularly for our students enrolled in public schools, in order to spur long-term economic prosperity.

These and other challenging issues face our community, such as food security, quality job opportunities, and equitable justice in our criminal and legal systems. This leads us to ask: What steps can we take to drive the outcomes we seek?

## County Consolidation: Historical Context & Negative Impacts

We live in a community where County Consolidation was not in the best interest of African Americans, as Macon gave up political power with the expectation of gaining economic power that never materialized. As background, in 2012 the City of Macon and the County of Bibb consolidated, which ultimately led to school redistricting and the weaponization of the criminal justice system by White leadership against local Black leaders.



Weaponization of the criminal justice system served to undermine the credibility of our city's Black leaders and to prevent the rise of Black leadership to the mayor's office.

The attempts to undermine credible African American leadership in our community have been ongoing since the 1960s, were the catalyst behind the aforementioned vote for consolidation, and continue throughout today as our community's White leadership seeks to maintain control and protect their privilege. Their intentions have been manifested through an undereducated general population that also suffers from disproportionate rates of poverty.

The negative effects of county consolidation can also be seen in the Office of Small Business Affairs. The Office of Small Business Affairs was created as an official organ of the consolidated government to ensure minority business owner participation in government contract awards. Significant opportunities for engaging in government contracting were on the increase through funding for SPLOST, ESPLOST, GA DOT Road improvement projects, etc. Establishing the SBA office was supposed to mitigate the community's long history of inequity in African American business ownership, government contracting, and community economic development. In short, it was intended to promote wealth-building in the African American community.

Unfortunately, consolidation led to a loss of political power, economic power, and social capital for Black residents in the county. The White leaders who pushed for (and got) consolidation did not provide adequate funding or deliver on promised gains. Instead of the anticipated benefits, consolidation created a climate of undereducation and poverty in the Black community.

## Obstacles stand in the way of business growth and economic stability.

In the Macon metropolitan area, African American wealth and prosperity continues to come under assault. Black people are underrepresented in business ownership and participation in government and private sector contracting, based on the population. Historically, African American business ownership has lagged in our community in relation to other Georgia communities. Furthermore, we know the unemployment rate drives poverty in our community. Current data show that African Americans comprise approximately 45% of the metro area, yet our unemployment rate is nearly twice the rate of the White community.

## Educational inequity erodes prosperity in the region

Too many students graduating from the Bibb County School district are not prepared with the necessary skills to succeed in higher education, training in high-demand fields, or employment and advancement in living wage jobs. Georgia's Governor's Office of Student Achievement reports show Bibb County Schools rating among the lowest performing schools in the state.

The consensus among able, progressive parents is that when their children graduate from high school, they should go away to college and not plan to return to this community. They express the belief that our region holds no future, no hope, nor any desirable good for planting roots. Without serious change, we will be drained of the next generation's treasure and talent. We will have prepared no young leaders willing and able to tackle the issues important to our shared survival.

## Rising crime paralyzes advancement

The crime rate in our community has a negative impact on our ability to move forward. For example, according to FBI's 2020 Uniform Crime Report, the Macon metropolitan area ranks 22nd in violent crimes per 100,000 people. Furthermore, the Macon-Bibb County Sheriff's Office reported that our community is on track to exceed 55 homicides this year, which is 11 higher than last year. Macon County has one of the highest crime rates in America compared to all communities of all sizes -- from the smallest towns to the very largest cities. Yet we see no urgency on the part of the consolidated government's leadership to understand the underlying causes nor to invest in proven solutions.

## We Must Press on for Change

Much of the present policies that govern our community are punitive in nature and have made Macon-Bibb County less competitive than the communities around us. As examples, we are saddled with higher taxes, fewer public safety resources, high incidences of crime, entire blighted neighborhoods, roads in disrepair, non-working streetlights leaving communities dark at night, and high incidences of pedestrian fatalities.

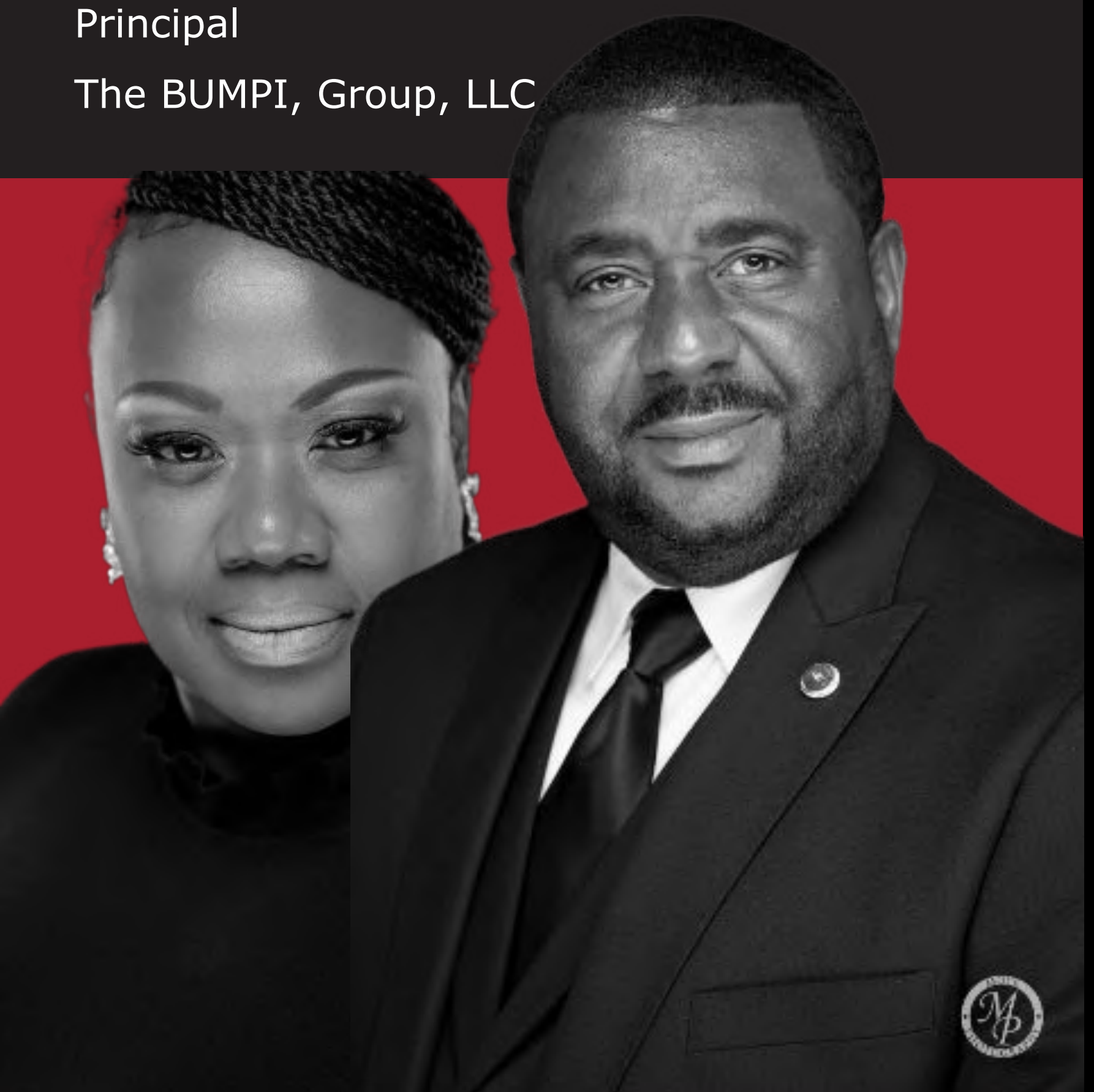
## Can we do better? **Can we be better?**

Yes. **Together, we can.** Awareness, Advocacy, Action, and Accountability must be employed. In addition, we've got to vote. When I think about that, I am reminded of what Paul said about Pressing ...



### Rev. Dr. James Louis Bumpus and Mrs. Renee' Hope Bumpus

Principal  
The BUMPI, Group, LLC



*I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:14)*

We must press -- until we come to the unity of the faith in the bond of peace ...

We must press -- until justice rolls down like water and righteousness like a mighty stream ...

We must press -- until we are joined together, all God's children ...

We must press -- until our communities are actualized ...

We must press -- until our people are recognized ...



# Savannah: Age-old racial disparities mar the beauty of the nation's oldest city

By Alicia Johnson

Regional Essays / Savannah

With its lush landscapes, beautiful waterways, and rich heritage, Savannah is the country's oldest city and home to the third largest port in the nation. Savannah is the fifth largest city in Georgia and is seated in the county of Chatham on the east coast of the Atlantic Ocean. Voted as one of the top travel destinations in the United States, the city is full of historic landmarks, picturesque parks, city squares, and streets shaded by stately oaks.

A population of less than 200,000 and a cost-of-living 6% below the national average makes the city an attractive place for millions of tourists and retirees annually. However, beneath the oak-lined canopy, Savannah has persistent generational poverty. While Savannah is a city rich in human, natural, and creative resources, thousands of its residents – at least 22% – live in income poverty, and 43.5% of Households of Color live in asset poverty with a net worth of zero (Prosperity Now, 2021).

According to the Opportunity Project, children of color growing up in “opportunity areas” in the city are expected to make less than \$25K by age 35.

Georgia's asset poverty rate is 27.3%, while the national rate is 24.1% (Prosperity Now, 2020). Comparing this to Savannah's asset poverty rate of 35.5% means that more than one in three Savannah households is without sufficient net worth to navigate the loss of a job (Prosperity Now, 2020).

## The city's Black poverty rate more than triples that of Whites'

The income poverty rate for African Americans in Savannah is 26.1% compared to their White counterparts at 7.2%. Moreover, the labor market engagement and jobs proximity index show that African Americans in Savannah are the least successful in accessing employment. On average, they live in neighborhoods with a 10-point gap in job proximity and a 17-point gap in labor market engagement compared to their White counterparts (City of Savannah Assessment of Fair Housing, 2017).

Citizens in Chatham County are more likely to be asset-poor than average Georgians.

They are less able to respond to unexpected events such as sudden loss of income or unforeseen medical expenses. COVID-19 has only exacerbated these growing inequities.

Many of our low-wage working families cannot take advantage of asset-building opportunities such as obtaining higher-paying jobs, having savings, buying a home, or obtaining postsecondary credentials. In Chatham County, 39.18% of households are cost-burdened renters. Savannah, the largest city in the county, has nearly 50% (46.9%) of households that are cost-burdened renters, paying over 30%-50% of their income for housing (2021, ACS).

Additionally, between 2018 and 2020, food insecurity in Chatham County increased by nearly 6% to 19%. Meanwhile, child food insecurity increased by a little over 10% to 27%, with 67% of those falling at or below 185% of the federal poverty line guideline for the last four years (2020, Feeding America). Approximately 64.57% of Savannah/Chatham County School District's 2018- 2019 enrolled students are disadvantaged (Georgia Department of Education).

## Understanding the reasons and the solutions

Step Up Savannah has identified several barriers for residents through its direct servicing programming. First, unemployment and underemployment are exacerbated by the social determinants of poverty, such as unstable home environments, crime, lack of transportation, and lack of childcare.

Further, higher-paying jobs such as those in I.T., healthcare, and manufacturing are not easily obtainable due to transportation barriers and inaccessible affordable childcare. Because of a lack of essential resources and access for impoverished communities, many residents are unable to attain credentials or soft skills to sustain employment or they experience instability that interrupts employment. Without support systems to meet the most basic needs, residents are blocked from resources and services other communities take for granted.



Working families also experience another roadblock when career advancement puts them above the income eligibility threshold for public assistance programs, becoming a barrier to their economic mobility. Career advancement or any moderate wage increases can result in the family being ineligible for public assistance programs before they have stabilized financially. This results in the family becoming worse off (a benefits cliff) or no better off (a benefits plateau) than before the wage increase.

This loss of means-tested public assistance is an effective marginal tax rate on income gains. High effective marginal tax rates mean that some workers have a financial disincentive to invest in their own human capital and advance from lower-wage work to jobs that lead to economic self-sufficiency. Lastly, those with justice involvement in their backgrounds are often left out of securing higher-paying jobs and require greater assistance with employment placements. Without sufficient bridging capital across the social safety net (through funding of programming, adequate reentry service models, people-centered policy, and long-term community investments), Savannah and cities like it across our state and nation will continue the legacy of persistent poverty and lock its future generations out of the financial security readily available in our state.

You and I can change these economic realities and create a legacy of prosperity for those coming behind us. To alleviate poverty and achieve economic equity in Georgia, we must be intentional about developing a means of ending policies, practices, systems, and structures that sentence people to economic insecurity. At the same time, we must raise those that prioritize measurable differences coupled with deliberate community investments. This is our challenge – that we must all **STEP UP TOGETHER!**

## Alicia Johnson

Executive Director  
Step Up Savannah



Step Up Savannah promotes economic opportunity and financial security in Chatham County, GA. While more than a quarter of Savannah's residents live in poverty, that percentage jumps to 50% and higher in some neighborhoods. Such high rates have persisted for more than 30 years.

Established in 2005 by a group of community leaders who recognized that the city's pockets of concentrated poverty impair the economic development of the entire community, Step Up incorporated as an independent nonprofit in 2008 and now has a 39-member board of directors.

The organization acts as a convener, attracts outside resources, adapts and creates effective programs and products, trains neighborhood and nonprofit leaders, and advocates for policies that will improve the lives of low-income families. It works through a participative process relying upon its diverse board of directors and a network of partners, seeking out lasting solutions that enable low-income families to work toward economic self-sufficiency.



# Policy & Legislative Recommendations

**The Urban League of Greater Atlanta in collaboration with our authors and partners has developed a working policy agenda representing a compilation of recommendations from advocates for education, economics, health, civic engagement, and social justice. It is not meant to be all inclusive but rather a working and ongoing process and agenda for systemic and equitable change in Georgia to improve the lives of Black and All Georgians.**

## I. Economics

Nearly every aspect of well-being for people living in the USA is tied to economics. While each of our five focus areas influences the other, it can be argued that financial stability makes it easier to set and reach goals in the other subject areas. In this section, we touch on the foundational elements affecting the economic well-being of Black people and communities in Georgia, listing a few policy recommendations for state and/or local municipalities to improve outcomes.

The state of Georgia is the number one state for business for the ninth consecutive year. No other state has earned this distinction for so many years, yet every fifth child lives below the poverty line in the state. With the additional impact of inflation, Georgians continue to struggle to make ends meet. Highlighting affordable housing, workforce, small minority businesses, energy costs, child tax credits and more will steer Black Georgians toward economic stability.

The Urban League supports the passage of an Earned Income Tax (EITC) in Georgia. January 27th marks the 17th annual Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) Awareness Day. Across the country, community organizations, schools, employers, and state and local governments are spreading the word to encourage eligible Americans to claim the EITC and other federal tax credits. The EITC serves as one of the nation's most effective policies at keeping working families out of poverty. This is why 32 states and the District of Columbia have adopted their own versions of this credit. Unfortunately, Georgia is not among them. We urge legislators to prioritize passing a refundable EITC, a proposal known as a Georgia Work Credit, at 10% of the federal EITC.

The benefits of a Georgia Work Credit are varied and vast. A Georgia Work Credit would reduce the amount of tax owed by low- and middle-income working families who struggle to make ends meet. It would boost small businesses and local economies by giving consumers more disposable income to put back into their communities. Research has also shown that EITCs have positive impacts on maternal and infant health, academic outcomes for children in elementary and middle schools, small businesses, increased college attainment, and more.

Any family eligible for the federal EITC would also benefit from a GWC. This includes:

- About 1.1 million Georgia households, or about 23 percent of all tax filers.
- Around 2.5 million Georgians in total.
- Nearly 1.4 million children.
- 60,000 veterans and military families.

We were pleased to see that last year's legislative session marked the first affirmative vote by a legislative chamber to add an EITC to Georgia's tax code. We believe this step is a clear sign that there is bipartisan support for creating a Georgia Work Credit to better support the state's working families. We look forward to building upon that momentum and spreading awareness about the benefits of this proven anti-poverty measure.

The passage of a refundable Georgia Work Credit would support more than 2 million Georgians in making ends meet for their families.

# Policy & Legislative Recommendations

## Affordable Housing

Help Black Americans have access to safe, well maintained and affordable housing and stay in their homes.

In February 2023, State Sen. Donzella James, D-Atlanta, told [Capital B Atlanta](#) that she plans to propose a bill in the current 2023 legislative session to do away with the state law from 1984 that prohibits rent control.

(<https://atlantaciviccircle.org/2023/02/03/atlanta-mayor-dickens-supports-rent-control/>)

“Georgia has no statewide rent control policies, and the state law prohibits cities or counties from enacting their own rent control policies. This gives landlords the freedom to price however they see fit and sets a competitive market for real estate in all sectors.” (<https://atlantaciviccircle.org/2023/02/03/atlanta-mayor-dickens-supports-rent-control/>)

Prior to COVID, Georgia enjoyed relatively stable rental rates. “Even though Georgia does not have rent control, the state enjoys a relatively stable rental average, ranking only 35th highest in the country for rental prices. Fair market rents range from \$648 to \$1,185 for a 2-bedroom unit, depending on the location. The Atlanta metro area has the highest rental rates in the state, with an average of \$1,016 per month for studio apartments and \$1,823 per month to rent a house or 4-bedroom apartment.”

(<https://law.justia.com/codes/georgia/2021/title-44/chapter-7/article-1/section-44-7-19/>)

According to the White House Fact Sheet, “Of the \$25 billion in rental assistance that was spent in 2021, Black Americans were the largest group that required and received this help, representing more than 40% of aid recipients.” ([The Biden-Harris Administration Advances Equity and Opportunity for Black Americans and Communities Across the Country | The White House](#)) Yet recipients need a path toward a more sustainable future.

However, post COVID, landlords have been allowed to escalate rents at their discretion forcing low-income renters from their homes. Increases have been reported as high as 40-50% pricing millions of low to moderate income working Georgians out of their homes, into their cars and temporary and unsustainable housing in extended stay motels and inadequate motel rooms at exorbitant daily rates forcing many to pay even higher rates due to inability to amass on a monthly basis the rent required driven by low wage employment and high costs of child care and transportation. Low income Georgia families are in CRISIS and no end is in sight for our most precious commodity - the PEOPLE of our state.

Further, too many landlords are not regulated to make repairs and maintenance investments in their properties to make them livable for families. Too many landlords refuse to make necessary repairs to ensure a safe and livable environment for their renters. And many are receiving government subsidies from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development and Housing Authorities across the state for unlivable and unsafe units. Laws must be passed to require landlords to provide and maintain safe and well maintained housing units.

We are supporting the policy recommendations of Habitat for Humanity, and call for a variety of steps adopted across our state to address housing issues including those that mitigate gentrification and better protect low- and moderate-income residents from displacement as cities continue to grow and develop ([5 policy solutions to advance racial equity in housing | Habitat for Humanity](#)). These steps will help advance our goals of stabilizing housing and closing the Black homeownership gap within a generation.

- **Require higher percentages of affordable housing units in granting zoning permits** and increase supply by adjusting the household income threshold for major developments.
- **Increase access to down payment assistance.** “Discriminatory policies that have excluded Black families from homeownership, education and job opportunities often leave Black parents with less wealth to pass on to their children. Down payment assistance programs, like matched savings programs and advanceable tax credits for low-income first-time homebuyers, can help reduce this hurdle.” (Habitat for Humanity)
- **Increase access to affordable credit.** “Given the history of redlining and discriminatory lending in the U.S., to balance the scales, we must extend mortgage and business credit to underserved, low-income and minority homebuyers and communities. Many tools for rectifying racial inequities in lending exist but need to be strengthened.” (Habitat for Humanity)
- **Invest in affordable homeownership.** “Even when down payment assistance is available, unaffordable home prices remain a major obstacle to homeownership. Expanding government grants that finance affordable home construction can help builders like Habitat for Humanity create lasting, sustainable homeownership opportunities.” (Habitat for Humanity)

# Policy & Legislative Recommendations

## Workforce Development

Design policies to promote equity in employment and wage growth.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Mississippi, the District of Columbia, Georgia, Maryland, and Louisiana had the largest shares of their labor force that were African American in 2020. African Americans comprised more than 30 percent of the labor force in each. By comparison, African Americans accounted for 12.6 percent of the U.S. labor force.” ([Four states and D.C. had labor force that was more than 30 percent African American in 2020 : The Economics Daily: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics \(bls.gov\)](#))

Clearly, our entire state would benefit by policies designed to level the playing field and open access to training, education, and sustainable-wage jobs to Black workers who make up nearly one-third of our state’s workforce. The demographic groups who have been consigned to low-income, poverty wages historically can, and should, be trained to fill the needs in technology, transportation, healthcare, and other 21<sup>st</sup> century high-demand fields where employers are eager to fill positions. We advocate for an **increase in public-private partnerships** to achieve this goal.

- **Incorporate workforce training and hiring requirements** for Georgia-based businesses that are granted state tax incentives. This would permit the state to leverage the economic impact to support building a higher skilled workforce and increase Georgians’ household incomes.
- **Increase** Georgia’s State Minimum Wage to \$15 an hour, as a mechanism to advance equitable employment outcomes.

## Invest in and Develop Minority/Black Owned Business

**Create a capital fund to increase access to capital for Black start-ups, growth and expansion**

While Black owned businesses are being created at a faster rate than other ethnic groups, they have the least access to the life blood of any small business enterprise: capital for startup and operating costs. Black firms only received 1% of the venture capital awarded in 2021 nationwide.

**Increase access to contracts and growth opportunities for Black Firms and MBEs.**

The state of Georgia has conducted two disparity studies in 2012 and 2016 that clearly show that Georgia is not utilizing Black and other minority firms (other than women owned) in an equitable manner and that must change.

Georgia’s state Department of Administrative Services reports that Georgia ranks third among states based on the percentage of small businesses that are minority-owned, “with 36.6% of its small businesses” in that category - a total of 470,000 being small or minority owned as of 2022 ([Georgia DOAS SBSB Initiative Report 103122.pdf \(ga.gov\)](#)). Yet the rate of state contracting with Black businesses is woefully low.

According to the Georgia Minority Supplier Development Council, structural and entrenched barriers work against Black and minority-owned businesses. “While minorities comprise 48% of Georgia’s population, MBEs (Minority Business Enterprises) account for only 21.3% of privately-owned Georgia businesses and only 12.2% of the annual revenues earned by these businesses. ([State-of-Minority-Owned-Businesses-in-Georgia.pdf \(gmsdc.org\)](#))

“This disparity is particularly extreme in case of Black businesses. In 2018, Blacks made up 32.6% of Georgia’s population, but Blacks owned only 5.1% of all private businesses in Georgia. Furthermore, these businesses earned only 2.1% of the annual revenues earned by businesses in Georgia.” (Georgia Minority Supplier Development Council) We advocate for action to bring full equity in contracting to open doors of opportunity for MBEs throughout the state. At least 38 states have state-level MBE development programs independent of existing federal DBE programs that are making a positive impact on their states.

- **Establish** a Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) development program and set-aside program to foster business development and growth by providing equitable access to state-wide procurement opportunities, operating capital, and technical assistance.

According to Upcounsel, the Official Code of Georgia Annotated Section 48.7.38 “encourages the use of minority- and female-owned businesses by offering state income tax credits for subcontractors and contractors using minority businesses.” ([Woman Owned Business Tax Benefits \(upcounsel.com\)](#))

- **Increase** Georgia tax credits encouraging companies to hire certified minority subcontractors. Currently the State of Georgia offers a tax break - **10% of payments up to \$100,000**. This tax break should be increased to encourage more participation.



# Policy & Legislative Recommendations

## Reparations

The state of Georgia should follow the lead of Fulton County and other government units across the nation in committing to reparations for Black Georgians to atone for the state's history of discrimination and racial oppression including Black Code and Jim Crow laws, lynchings and the institutional racism that is embedded in every aspect of daily life. The Fulton County Commission recently approved a reparations task force to be created supported by \$250,000 to lay the foundation for Black Fulton County residents to receive financial payments in the future.

<https://fultoncountyga.gov/reparationstaskforce>

## Energy/Lowering Energy Costs for Underserved Communities

**Make energy costs affordable and energy efficiency available to low and moderate-income households.**

Low-income households, as well as Black, Hispanic, and Native American households, pay a much larger share of their income on energy bills, straining budgets and putting them at heightened risk of utility shutoffs. Georgia is in the top five states with the highest utility costs, a 2019 report published by The Atlanta Journal-Constitution found ([Georgia ranks No. 5 for highest utility costs, report says \(ajc.com\)](#)).

Atlanta's historically Black communities experience disproportionate energy burden (*Dumping in Dixie*, Robert D. Bullard). According to the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy, the "Median energy burden is 3.5%, and the median low-income energy burden is 9.7% in the Atlanta metropolitan area. For example: 36% of Black households (284,220) and 35% of Hispanic households (58,835) in the Atlanta metropolitan area experience a high energy burden (above 6%). Low-income households (9.7%), low-income multifamily households (6.6%), and older adults (5.1%) experienced the highest median energy burdens in Atlanta".

([https://www.aceee.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/aceee-01\\_energy\\_burden\\_-\\_atlanta.pdf](https://www.aceee.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/aceee-01_energy_burden_-_atlanta.pdf)) We advocate for direct action to address the utility burdens on Georgians with low incomes.

- **“Set energy burden goals and track progress.** Local and state policymakers and utilities can set energy affordability and energy burden goals as a first step to addressing energy insecurity in their communities.

For example, Atlanta's City Resilience Strategy includes action to lift energy burdens of 10% of Atlanta's households. "Once goals are set, cities need to identify specific strategies to lower high energy burdens and track iterative progress to make sure they achieve the goal." (ACEEE)

- **Increase funding for low-income weatherization.** "Local governments can devote funds to support weatherization and energy efficiency retrofit programs funded through the local utility or federal programs, partner with local implementers on a low-income energy efficiency program, or fund and run their own innovative pilot or energy efficiency program." (ACEEE)

"...The City of Atlanta, in partnership with Invest Atlanta, funds the Atlanta Heritage Owner-Occupied Rehab Program. The program provides up to \$30,000 in a forgivable loan to eligible Atlanta residents for health and safety repairs on their homes, prioritizing seniors, veterans, disabled heads of households, and longtime residents." (ACEEE)

"The city funds the program through the Housing Opportunity Bond, which was created to provide financing for the development of single and multifamily affordable housing. The city can dedicate additional funding to this program or invest in additional weatherization efforts." (ACEEE) This model could be adopted in other municipalities.

- **Pass laws that prohibit utilities from becoming monopolies.**
- **Create an equity office.** States like Washington and Illinois have already taken this step.

# Policy & Legislative Recommendations

- **Repeal Construction Work in Progress (CWIP).** Ratepayers are charged for the financing of new power plants before the construction of these plants are complete and can provide electricity.
- “While utilities love CWIP, its effect on consumers is much less of a boon. CWIP converts consumers into involuntary investors, placing the burden of up-front financing costs onto them. The costs end up on their bills sooner, before they ever receive electricity from the plant in question, and there is little recourse should the costs skyrocket or the project be abandoned.” ([Utility agenda: Construction Work in Progress \(CWIP\) | Citizens Action Coalition \(citact.org\)](https://citact.org/utility-agenda-construction-work-in-progress-cwip/))
- **End disproportionate disconnections.** Black and other minority customers are more likely to face service disconnections and higher bills due poor quality housing stock and low household income.
- **Gather accurate data.** Lack of transparency in data plagues the energy industry. Addressing racial disparities in energy is difficult without accurate data on race and income.
- **Offer meaningful bill pay assistance.** Georgia is one of only 11 states that do not require utility assistance for those in energy poverty.
- **Promote Energy Efficiency Programs to low-income renters.** Many states offer programs to access advanced lighting technologies, smart thermostats and bill pay assistance
- **Accelerate carbon emissions reductions.** Georgia is one of only ten states without renewable energy goals or climate change plan.
- **Expand Georgia’s energy efficiency investments.** Georgia ranks 45th out of 50 in spending that directly helps people afford their utility bills

According to the National Governor’s Association, “The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) of 2022 is the largest federal investment in clean energy in U.S. history and includes substantial tax incentives for employers who pay prevailing wages and employ registered apprentices on qualifying energy projects (construction, alteration, or repair projects including solar, wind, geothermal, carbon sequestration, and electric vehicle charging stations). State workforce development leaders are well positioned to partner with energy sector employers by developing and scaling apprenticeship programs so employers can meet the IRA’s apprenticeship requirements and qualify for more tax credits. These new tax incentives made available by IRA mean state workforce development systems can play a proactive role in establishing mutually beneficial public-private partnerships to expand opportunities for workers and boost employers’ bottom line.”

(<https://www.nga.org/publications/engaging-employers-in-the-apprenticeship-system-through-ira-tax-incentives/>)

We support the opportunities to consider that the NGA has outlined:

- “Identify employers in Georgia that are pursuing or have already established qualifying projects
  - Strengthen and publicize pre-apprenticeship and youth apprenticeship programs
  - Help employers increase access to these apprenticeships so underrepresented populations and those with the greatest barriers to employment can benefit
  - Align these efforts with those of your economic development, energy, and infrastructure partners and policymakers”
- (<https://www.nga.org/publications/engaging-employers-in-the-apprenticeship-system-through-ira-tax-incentives/>)

# Policy & Legislative Recommendations

## Child Tax Credits

Use this proven means to continue to lift children out of poverty.

Census figures show that the Child Tax Credit lifted 2.9 million children out of poverty. Additionally, the Census reported that the 2021 expansion accounted for 2.1 million of the 2.9 million children lifted above the poverty line by November 2022.

We **support** a continuation at levels that allow children to escape poverty.

The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities details that the American Rescue Plan increased the Child Tax Credit from \$2,000 per child to \$3,000 per child for children over the age of 6, from \$2,000 to \$3,600 for children under the age of 6 and raised the age limit from 16 to 17. All working families were to get the full credit if they make up to \$150,000 for a couple or \$112,500 for a family with a single parent (also called Head of Household). ([Policy Basics: The Child Tax Credit | Center on Budget and Policy Priorities \(cbpp.org\)](#))

This year, Georgia families with incomes below \$125,000 will get back up to half of what they spent on childcare in 2021 while working or studying – saving up to **\$4,000 for one child or \$8,000 for two or more children under age 13**. Families earning up to \$438,000 can get a partial credit.

The child tax credit (CTC) will reset to \$2,000 per child in 2022 and 2023.

## II. Education

Take family income and neighborhood tax base out of the equation for funding public schools. Poverty affects our state's education system. According to the World Bank, an estimated 7 in 10 of all children in low- and middle-income counties cannot read a simple text with comprehension by age 10 ([70% of 10-Year-Olds now in Learning Poverty, Unable to Read and Understand a Simple Text \(worldbank.org\)](#)). Georgia Trend states that only 42% of Georgia public school children are reading proficiently by the end of third grade ([Why Early Reading Matters - Georgia Trend Magazine](#)). These educational deficiencies continue through higher education, as the Census mentioned that only 37.9% of people have a bachelor's degree ([Census Bureau Releases New Educational Attainment Data](#)). Below are the recommendations to improve education for Black Georgians.

As a result of historic segregation and oppression, Black and low-income students are at a disadvantage in our state's public schools. According to the Georgia Budget and Policy Institute, disparities are especially severe in Georgia's rural "Black Belt" areas -- the location of generations of "enslaved labor, oppression ... and systemic discrimination and exclusion" of Black Georgians. (<https://gbpi.org/education-in-georgias-black-belt/>). We include their findings and others as a basis for several of our policy recommendations.

- **Create** an Opportunity Weight to serve students living in poverty.
- **Revise** Equalization and Sparsity Grants to better address district-specific needs.
- **Institute** universal kindergarten in the State of Georgia.
- **Reinvest** in Pre-Kindergarten to improve educational outcomes.
- **Upgrade** the public-school funding formula and system that has been in place for over 30 years, to provide school districts with more equitable funding that is student centered and generates the same level of funding regardless of geographic location or zip code of students. The change would move schools closer to having the resources required to better meet the learning needs of the children being served in each district.

# Policy & Legislative Recommendations

- **Increase funding** for public school students to participate in tuition-free post-secondary education options such as the Early College Essentials Certificate, which allows students to gain college credit while finishing high school.
- **Expand** access to the HOPE Scholarship to qualify students based on need whose future financial security will be changed forever if they have access to a high demand post-secondary/college education.” (GBPI)
- **Fund the HOPE Need-Based Scholarship Authorized in 2018** - A 2020 study by the Georgia Budget & Policy Institute found racial inequities in what students receive scholarships that cover the most tuition costs for college in Georgia. The GBPI recommends that the Georgia Legislature fund **need-based scholarships that were authorized by the Georgia General Assembly in 2018 but have yet to receive funding** having a direct and negative impact on Black, Latino and low-income students. GBPI also recommends expanding the HOPE Career Grant, which specifically provides tuition benefits to students pursuing certain fields at technical colleges, to all technical college fields. (GBPI)
- **Maximize lottery funds used to fund education**, by increasing the percentage of ticket sales turned over for education and make a plan to spend or convert excess reserve money into an endowment for education. (Southern Education Foundation)
- **Eliminate** school voucher programs, education savings accounts, tax-credit scholarship programs, and other efforts to fund private schools with public dollars.
- **Prohibit** the use of public resources for virtual and for-profit charter schools.
- **Support** the advancement of high-quality magnet schools that promote racial and socioeconomic diversity.

## III. Social/Criminal Justice

Social and Criminal Justice, as well as safety, are at the forefront in many Black Georgian households. Reform is necessary to advance justice across the state. Statistical disparities in arrests, probation periods, fines, access to adequate legal representation, long-term incarcerations rates, and police-community relations show deep racial bias in our state’s policing and criminal justice systems.

At the same time, laws affecting voting rights have resulted in voter suppression despite an increase in participation in the 2020 election cycle. These problems -- while deeply entrenched -- are not without solutions. We support the policies from the Georgia Justice Project, and we note below policies that have worked in other states, in many cases, to close the race gap in “justice for all.” ([Our Policy Approach - Georgia Justice Project \(gjp.org\)](https://www.gjp.org))

- **Reform oversight of prisons to improve safety and conditions for workers and inmates** - Current conditions are unsafe and inhumane in too many of Georgia’s prisons and jails. We need reforms to protect law enforcement personnel and inmates who are being extorted and harassed by other inmates and in some cases staff.
- **Reform state driver’s license suspension laws.** “A driver’s license in Georgia is often essential to employment yet Georgia suspends over 200,000 driver’s licenses each year for offenses unrelated to driving and public safety. Missing a court date or falling behind in child support payments can result in a suspension and start a cycle of poverty and justice involvement. There are over 50,000 arrests each year in Georgia for driving with a suspended license.” (Georgia Justice Project)

# Policy & Legislative Recommendations

- **End reliance on state and local revenue sources** that depend on the criminalization of poverty, such as court fines and fees, which cause and/or perpetuate economic hardships and barriers to prosperity.
- **Reform state occupational licensing laws** that limit access for Georgians with a record that impedes employment and the ability to earn a living, which can contribute to recidivism. “One in 7 Georgia jobs requires licensing. Excluding Georgians with a record creates barriers to equity and economic mobility, and harms employers who desperately need to fill skilled positions.” (Georgia Justice Project)
- **Promote statewide citizens complaint review boards** and the Georgia Ethical Policing Act. House Bill 35 would set standards for “ethical policing” in Georgia law. It would also authorize local municipalities to create and operate citizen review boards to ensure accountability for ethical police conduct, as well as direct the attorney general to create a form for local agencies to use to record complaints alleging police misconduct and disciplinary actions for such misconduct.
- **Support reentry of returning citizens** by expanding state funding (FY23-24) to provide secondary education/GED, job skills training and intensive individualized employment and reentry plans for people incarcerated in State of Georgia Correctional facilities. This will enhance their successful return to their communities and substantially reduce recidivism.
- **Pass legislation to keep guns out of the hands of children**, limit availability of assault weapons, restore the requirement of background checks and restrict weapons and open carry in public places, churches and schools and college campuses. Black Americans are disproportionately harmed by the direct and indirect consequences of gun violence, which causes lasting trauma for children, families, and communities.

## IV. Health

With 435,000 people uninsured in the state, Governor Kemp has yet to expand Medicaid. In both rural and urban areas, improving health care in the Black community in Georgia is crucial. Crises in mental health, maternal health, and hospital closures are issues deeply affecting the well-being of Black Georgians. We have seen progress in states that have implemented some of the policy recommendations that follow.

- **Expand Medicaid** to cover approximately 500,000 low-income Georgians that are approximately 1/3 of the 1.4 million uninsured Georgians that live in the state ([Fast Facts – Cover Georgia \(coverga.org\)](#)). Numerous studies have documented that expansion bolsters access to health care, increases affordability, and improves health for low-income populations. It also reduces racial and ethnic disparities, strengthens rural health care providers, and helps state economies. According to Georgia Public Broadcast, Georgia is one of 12 states that have not expanded Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act ([Judge clears way for implementation of Georgia’s narrow expansion of Medicaid | Georgia Public Broadcasting \(gpb.org\)](#)).
- **Increase state spending to prevent hospital closures.** Georgia continues to accept unequal access to affordable, high-quality health care for all its residents. Historically, “Georgia has ranked near the bottom in terms of Medicaid spending per enrollee. Georgia spent about \$5,037 per full benefit enrollee compared to the United States average of \$7,106 in 2019.” ([Georgia Health Budget Primer for State Fiscal Year 2023 - Georgia Budget and Policy Institute \(gbpi.org\)](#))

# SOBG Policy & Legislative Recommendations

“Georgia expects to spend \$4.1 billion in state funds in 2023 to serve Georgians covered by Medicaid. The 2023 budget reflects some modest increases in Medicaid reimbursement – for example, \$10.7 million for reimbursement of therapeutic services ... Ranking third nationally in the number of uninsured people, Georgia continues to struggle with the impact of not expanding Medicaid –a decision that reflects an inequitable distribution of power and history of oppression. While more than 1 in 10 Georgians do not have health care coverage, the burden is heaviest on Georgians living in rural communities and Georgians of color.” ([Georgia Health Budget Primer for State Fiscal Year 2023 - Georgia Budget and Policy Institute \(gbpi.org\)](#))

- **Close Georgia’s coverage gap.** Georgia is one of 12 states that has not accepted federal funds to cover low-income Georgia adults through the Medicaid program. Approximately 400,000 Georgians do not qualify for Medicaid under current state law and do not earn enough income to qualify for financial help to purchase health insurance. We support closing this gap by extending health insurance to all Georgians with incomes up to 138 percent of the federal poverty level. COVID-19, consequent job losses, and reduced state revenues were not on the radar of Georgia leaders when they conceptualized the Georgia Pathways waiver in 2019. Given the seismic changes Georgia has experienced since, we encourage state leaders to abandon Georgia Pathways and instead examine policy options that cover more people and make more efficient use of state and federal funds.

## V. Civic Engagement

Having an informed citizenry is necessary to have healthy civic engagement in the community. Being informed includes knowing who the policy makers are and who has an influence on decisions on the local, state, and national level. We have long advocated for action at the state government level to reverse the decades of harm wrought by racially biased policies. The need has never been greater to allow all legal Georgia residents to experience the rights and responsibilities of full citizenship, as follows.

- **Promote access to Voter Registration and Voting.**

**ULGA Supports HB941 a bill which would** completely repeal of the state’s voting law — even provisions that authorize ballot drop boxes and mandate a second Saturday of early voting statewide. The legislation would also roll back parts of the law, such as new ID requirements for absentee voting and the ability for the state to replace county election boards. (Ongoing review of Fulton County elections office could lead to first Georgia takeover ([ajc.com](#)))

# The Importance of Democracy

By John Moye

Senior Director, Policy, Legislative Affairs & Civic Engagement

Urban League of Greater Atlanta

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At a time when our nation's democratic institution is under attack, it is essential to understand our current system of governance and what it means to each individual citizen living in the United States. Above all else, the power of the vote embodies the tenets of democracy. Every voting-age citizen needs to pay attention to this because people who vote have a hand in shaping their present, their future, and the world.

Democracy has played a vital role in civilization, helping transform the world from power structures of monarchy, empire, and conquest into popular rule, self-determination, and peaceful coexistence. Properly applied, not only does democracy allow all people to have an equal voice, but it is also inherently an extremely flexible system that encourages the government to adapt according to changing realities and ideologies.

## *Your role as a citizen*

The role of the citizen is critical to the successful implementation of democracy. Democracy allows citizens to be empowered to bring about change through participation and persuade the powerful to act for the greater good. In turn, citizens must perform their duties effectively and respect the law and the governance of the country. In a democracy, citizens are called upon to be politically aware and informed about all the ongoing events in the country. It is our duty to elect efficient representatives.

It is also important that we support policies that can directly benefit our communities. Since our founding in 1920, the Urban League of Greater Atlanta has advocated for social and economic progress for African Americans in the State of Georgia. Most recently through our key issues agenda for 2022, we have worked tirelessly to combat obstacles to progress and to advance policies that align with the League's mission.

## **Policies and Recommendations for The State of Black Georgia**

In 2022 we embarked upon a mission of engaging with community members, expert professionals, and local leaders to identify key policies and recommendations that can improve the lives of Black Americans in the State of Georgia. Over the last six months we metro area regions of Albany, Atlanta, Augusta, Columbus, Macon, and Savannah and convened Black leaders from rural areas across the state.

## Education

- Advance educational opportunity by changing the education investment formula from a property tax base to needs based and institute mandatory Kindergarten and Pre-K for all children.
- Expand educational opportunities via the P-Tech Dual Enrollment Act to ensure a steady workforce pipeline for STEM fields for 9th graders and towards associate degrees, with a priority placed on underserved communities.
- Develop a statewide broadband strategy to increase access to digital learning opportunities with a priority focus on rural access.

## Health

- Expand Medicaid to increase access to healthcare for the under- and uninsured populations, thereby meeting the needs of the most vulnerable and creating jobs for economically distressed communities.
- Understand and accept that racism has played a crucial and debilitating part in the marginalization of Black Georgians by contributing to the systematic inaccessibility of healthcare resources.
- Vote for legislators who will pass meaningful measures aimed at addressing disparate health outcomes.

## Small Business

- Advocate for the equitable inclusion of Black entrepreneurs in government contracting at the local, state, and federal levels.
- Encourage policies that result in an equitable increase in the number of sustainable Black-owned businesses, high-demand jobs, and generational wealth-building opportunities backed by infrastructure that produces and institutionalizes publicly available, state-level procurement data (disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and gender).



## Social Justice

- Expand the number of misdemeanor convictions that can be expunged for those rehabilitated, and reform the length of probation and parole terms to enable returning citizens to reenter society without excessively long connections to the system or extensive economically burdensome fees.
- Promote Occupational Licensing Reform, given that having a criminal record can be a barrier not just for obtaining a job but also to earning an occupational license.
- Enable Restorative, Victim-Centered Diversional Programs.
- Prioritize environmental and climate justice in Black communities as key pathways to shared prosperity.
- End Georgia's reliance on state and local revenue sources that depend on the criminalization of poverty, such as court fines and fees, the bail system, unpaid incarcerated labor, and incarceration fees that cause and/or perpetuate economic hardships and barriers to prosperity in Black communities.
- Revise officer training to include community-based and trauma-informed approaches to reduce abuse and misconduct against civilians.

## Policies and Recommendations for The State of Black Georgia

### John Moyer



Senior Director, Policy, Legislative Affairs & Civic Engagement  
Urban League of Greater Atlanta

Our aim is to encourage elected officials, researchers, and community stakeholders to develop plans to improve conditions and promote inclusive opportunities for Georgia's Black residents. Furthermore, we are focused on taking all the legal steps we can to protect our system of democracy. No other system of government guarantees the right to free expression of political preference, and no other system promotes progress through peaceful competition between different interests and ideas. Failing to protect every citizen's right to vote or refusing to accept your duty as a citizen to engage in the political process is tantamount to harming - even destroying - the freedoms we cherish under this political system.



# Call to Action



The State of Black Georgia is intended to be a “Call to Action” for all -- because we all have a stake in Georgia’s families being strong and in our collective future. If the problems detailed in this report are allowed to continue to fester, too many Black families will remain in crisis and more Black families, small businesses and communities in Georgia will decline and the racial wealth gap will widen even more.

Without intentional, immediate, deliberate, collective and collaborative action, Black Georgians will face even greater instability, adverse health conditions and suffer economically. The conditions range from increased homelessness and housing instability due to the critical shortage of affordable housing and rapidly rising rental costs, more lost lives due to gun violence, decreased life expectancy due to hospital closures and lack of insurance, continued limited access to capital and contracts by small businesses, unemployment, mass incarceration, educational deficiencies, and other inequities.

Continued intentional inadequate investments in our people and impoverished communities of Georgia will cost the state billions of dollars in lost consumer spending, labor shortages and stifled economic growth. It will mean the state shuts off untapped potential for innovation and talent development by not investing equitably in its most valued asset - its people - one third of whom are Black Georgians along with the millions of other low-income, rural, and racial groups who will remain locked out of the opportunity to thrive and contribute to our society.

Our lives and our futures are intrinsically linked and our ability to coexist peacefully, equitably, and civilly will determine if Georgia one day becomes “one Georgia” for all Georgians. We can and must do better.

So how do we “take action?” We hope our report has given us a wakeup call to many of the most egregious disparities and conditions across the State facing Black Georgians and now we need a roadmap for how we can do our part to elevate Georgia’s commitment and responsibility to its citizens, whom we all should be focused on with the urgency of now. We ask everyone to play a role:

- **Reclaim the Power of Your Vote.** Most of the reasons for debilitating conditions in Black communities can be substantially addressed through equitable policy and legislation. The people who make these decisions are our state, county, and municipal legislators, with the opportunity for collaborative influence from our congressional representatives to drive federal dollars to help Georgia. Despite what many people think and say - VOTING MATTERS. Who sits in the positions of power in the Georgia State Legislature (Representatives and Senators) and how they vote on laws and policy that directly impact our lives...MATTERS. There is strength in numbers.
- **Organize at the grassroots level.** Continue to collectively coordinate and expand voter registration drives, voter education, outreach events, and peaceful protests. Do the homework and research candidates and their records. Hold elected officials accountable by being civically engaged. Go to school board meetings and visit your elected officials at least once a year to discuss your concerns and solutions. We must use the power of our vote and work with allies to get the people in the seats at the Georgia Legislature who support laws and policies that align with our issues of concern; people whose platforms and values represent a commitment to advancing the Black community and fostering sustainable change.
- **Obstacles exist but don't let them stop you.** Know that certain institutional systems, laws, and entrenched practices and biases exist that are designed to block your progress. But they do not have to define your life or circumstances. You have the power to navigate and thrive, and to tap into organizations like the Urban League with the mission to help you. Empower yourself through direct action and seek the support you need.
- **Seek out resources to advance your life.** In most communities, you can find FREE and low-cost resources to support your journey to better health, housing, financial security, and upskilling/education and training. If you are in a rural community that lacks services, contact an organization in another part of the state or your congressional representative to see if you can be guided to county, state, or federal resources.
- **Create the beloved family and community.** Black families have been constrained and harmed by a long history of laws, discriminatory practices, intergenerational poverty, health disparities, trauma, stress, and mass incarceration that have marginalized our communities. Let's recommit to uniting "Family" by leaning into one another in love and support. Where there are relationships that need repair, seek out the support of counselors and mental health professionals to address the issues and try to approach reconciliation in a spirit of forgiveness.
- **Prioritize Health.** With the high cost of health care and limitations on access to healthcare providers, it is more important than ever to do all we can in our daily lifestyles to prioritize healthy habits. We have the power, even with limited income and resources, to make some key lifestyle changes that will contribute to better health and longer life spans including physical exercise - daily stretching and walking briskly just 30 minutes a day; healthier eating habits by cutting out/limiting fast and fried foods, sugar intake and sweets as well as increasing water consumption to a minimum of 8 glasses a day. While we have serious challenges with food deserts in our communities, can take steps such as urban gardening, less meat consumption and seeking out farmers' markets in our communities to find fresh fruits and vegetables that are necessary for a healthy diet. Personal commitments and encouraging others to do the same will result in improvements.
- **We must stop the violence.** Make a commitment that we will work together to push harder for the resources our communities need to reduce despair and destruction, and become non-violent, peaceful, empathetic, and loving in our interactions and relationships. Be a good listener, remain focused and optimistic even in the face of adversity. Let's seek mental health resources and services to address anger issues and past and present trauma. Let's commit to resolving issues peacefully and not turning to weapons and hurtful, harmful, vile words in anger.

**Learn conflict resolution skills and de-escalate disagreements.** Practice caution, discipline, forgiveness, and walk away from conflicts when you can. They are not worth losing your life over or taking another's that leads to irreparable harm that cannot be undone. Do not lose hope, even when you make mistakes or all seems difficult. Take one day at a time and purposefully work toward your goals.

- **Elevate your skills to increase your income/wealth.** Tap into your talents to elevate your income by taking steps to "upskill." Start wherever you are and stack credentials from there. You can accomplish this through GED classes that lead to a diploma that is the gateway to educational advancement. Seek out stackable high demand credentials, certificates and diplomas that are most often FREE via WorkSource Boards and Career One Stop Centers across the state.

Additional low cost/no cost opportunities are available via the Technical College System of Georgia and grants, scholarships and financial aid via the 10 Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in Georgia (Albany State University, Clark Atlanta University, Fort Valley State University, Interdenominational Theological Center, Morehouse College, Morehouse School of Medicine, Morris Brown College, Paine College, Savannah State University, and Spelman College), and the University System of Georgia, Urban League and other accredited institutions, CBOs and apprenticeship programs. Invest in your education for a return that lasts a lifetime.

- **Donate to, volunteer and support HBCUs, CBOs, Grassroots, Civil Rights, business, panhellenic and professional organizations, and qualified candidates for office who are on the frontline.** To continue the fight for the advancement of policies, legislation, resources, and opportunities that will measurably accelerate positive change in Black Georgia, the community must increase support of its frontline soldiers in the quest for equitable justice.
- **Run for Office.** Consider running for an elected office to fight on the frontlines for policies and legislation that will address the needs and issues of Black and other marginalized communities. Start on the local/county level such as the school board, city council/county commission, state representative or senator etc. Seek out mentors and programs that teach people interested in public service how to organize, mobilize, and run for office, and serve your community to make sustainable change.

- **Use SOBG as a guide.** Read and use as a guide the State of Black Georgia report and policy recommendations as a resource for learning about the needs of Black and marginalized Georgia residents. Use this information to drive your policy agendas with a focus on education, health, economics, expanding civic engagement and social justice.
- **Represent all of the people.** Execute your fiduciary duties with the knowledge that you were elected by the people who voted for you, but once elected, you represent all of the people in your jurisdiction and pledged to serve them through your oath of office.
- **Stay connected to your constituents.** Engage/host opportunities to meet with the community leaders, citizens, and small businesses in your district throughout the year to learn about their needs and to let them know what resources the state has to offer.
- **Establish a statewide fully funded MBE Office and Program.** Build upon and substantially expand Governor Kemp's Executive Order 07.13.22.01 and the nine recommendations contained in the Small Business and Supplier Diversity Initial Report dated October 2022. Establish an Office of Minority Business Enterprise for the sole purpose of advancing the utilization and development of Black, minority, and female-owned businesses respectively. The Office needs to be funded to support a staffing model that goes well beyond the position of Small Business & Supplier Diversity Manager to facilitate the substantial increase in Black business contracting across state agencies coupled with development of Black businesses by creating and investing in funds that provide capital to Black and other marginalized businesses.
- **Invest more in HBCUs.** Georgia is home to 10 HBCUs: Albany State University, Clark Atlanta University, Fort Valley State University, Interdenominational Theological Center, Morehouse College, Morehouse School of Medicine, Morris Brown College, Paine College, Savannah State University, and Spelman College. According to a study conducted by the United Negro College Fund (UNCF) in 2014 - HBCUs Make America Strong: The Positive Economic Impact of Historically Black Colleges and Universities—"HBCUs are economic engines in their Georgia communities and beyond, generating substantial economic returns year after year." The study shows that in 2014, the nine Georgia HBCUs at the time, (Morris Brown re-opened in 2019) generated \$1.3 billion in economic impact, supported 12,040 jobs and generated \$9.1 billion in lifetime earnings.

Greater investments in HBCUs will have a direct positive impact on Georgia's economy and move the needle on poverty in the Black community. Further, a Wallstreet Journal study reflecting its first corporate ranking that examined diversity and inclusion among S&P 500 companies - "The Business Case for More Diversity" concludes that "Diverse and inclusive cultures are providing companies with a competitive edge over their peers." By not investing in Georgia HBCUs, the state is missing out on billions of dollars of economic impact for the entire state.

- **Pass equitable laws and mandate equitable principles across all agencies.** Pass laws that directly address the disparities and conditions in the communities that you serve, especially those that keep lower income and racial minorities mired in poverty. Fight for our citizens that need us the most. Including them in the state's business boom will produce the greatest economic impact on the state. Establish policy that requires all state departments to apply equity principles to all major initiatives.
- **Engage in bi-partisan politics.** Intentionally and collaboratively work in a bi-partisan manner to address the needs, concerns and injustices that are affecting your constituents and all citizens in Georgia equitably. Prioritize the people, small businesses, and communities that are struggling to survive and advance their lives.



# State of Black Georgia

# Educational Institutions

- **Develop outreach programs to engage Black, rural, and low-income youth and adults.** With education offering the best pathway to livable wage careers and employment, educational institutions need to invest more in promoting and marketing their occupational training programs and targeting Black and other marginal communities.
- **Collaborate and raise more resources.** Education is the ladder to economic and financial empowerment. Partner to support more first-generation college students to attend and complete a college education with little to no debt in high-demand sectors. Collaborate with community and faith-based organizations to provide wrap around services and support to keep students in school despite challenges they may face.
- **Expand opportunities for remedial learning.** Expand remedial support for learning losses experienced during the COVID 19 pandemic. Learning losses hit Black, rural, and low-income students hardest, causing them to lose at least a year in many cases.
- **Focus more on career exploration and vocational opportunities.** Place significant resources and emphasis on career exploration and opportunities for youth and under skilled and unemployed workers. This is especially important for those from communities that have experienced disinvestment and those who may thrive in a setting that includes vocational education and training that leads to high-income careers in sectors desperately seeking to grow their workforce.
- **Invest in HBCUs.** HBCUs have seen an increase in enrollment in recent years. Leverage this interest to raise and direct more public research grants and private philanthropic dollars to help students with tuition and related costs that they cannot otherwise afford.



**State of Black Gergia**

- **Identify your passion and purpose.** A key to long term success is figuring out your passion and purpose to set a pathway to success and achieving your dreams. Explore all the possibilities and never give up. Commit or recommit to education and extracurricular activities based on your positive talents and interests to support your journey. Incorporate a plan to strengthen your networking through involvement in organizations and activities that will increase your contacts in your field of interest.
- **Step into leadership.** Take advantage of opportunities to join and lead activities, committees, and projects for clubs in school, church, community and grassroots organizations, athletic, recreational, and social activities. Promote mutual respect, embrace diversity and cross-cultural relationships, and encourage your peers to invest in making your neighborhood a welcoming, safe, and cared-for place to live. Respect yourselves, your peers, your families, your neighbors, and the local businesses that operate in your community.
- **Seek out advice and positive mentors.** Seek advice from your family, educators, clergy, community, youth, and civic leaders to help you chart a course for a future of economic stability and opportunity.
- **Start a business.** You are never too young to become an entrepreneur. Be creative and identify products and services that people need or want, test the marketplace with your idea, make a written plan, save, and find investors for startup costs and launch. Also seek out youth entrepreneur programs in your community that can teach you the best path forward. Some of the most successful ventures were started by young entrepreneurs.
- **Become active in local government.** Register to vote at your earliest opportunity. Vote, and when eligible, consider seeking office to become a public servant and be a part of the solution you want to manifest. Change starts with each of us. Your community needs fresh ideas and new leaders to guide us into the future.
- **Become a mentor, athlete, and community volunteer.** Communities thrive when the people who live and work there invest their time, talents, and treasure in making the community a great place to live. No matter where you live, you and your neighbors have the power to organize, unite advocate, and invest in your own community to make it better. Help a neighbor, organize community clean-up projects, host block parties, and create a village environment where all families look out for each other.



# State of Black Ge<sup>o</sup>rgia

- **Unite and collaborate.** We have seen the value of partnerships that drive campaigns in voter registration, education, mobilization, and participation. Additionally, progress has been driven by campaigns designed to offer positive activities for “at-promise” youth and young adults, returning citizens, and seniors who may be disaffected and at loose ends, or businesses that need additional support to survive.
- **Think bigger and bolder.** As you pursue new endeavors, initiatives, movements, and projects, let’s think bigger and bolder in how we do our work and ask for the resources we need to achieve the outcomes our communities need and deserve.
- **Cultivate and Support Young Leaders.** Black civil rights, community, and faith-based organizations must expand our support for and engagement in the cultivation and investment in young adults and professionals. We need to strengthen the pipeline of Black proactive and capable leaders who know their history and have access to opportunities for advancement in our organizations.
- **Advocate.** Partner to advocate for legislation at the local, state, and national level to drive equity in the justice system and address the range of social ills that keep far too many families locked in generational poverty.
- **Continue to Unite and Peacefully Protest** - Continue the legacy of the Civil Rights Movement through organized and disciplined peaceful protests. We must use this tried-and-true method to bring our bold collective and unified voices and demands together against injustices and for solutions and systemic change to the attention of our communities, elected officials, public servants and citizens.
- **Extend organizing efforts and focus on solutions.** Organize your constituencies to focus on solutions to the most pressing problems facing our individual communities. Turn to national and statewide stakeholders to seek information about “best practices” that can be replicated or enhanced for success in our state.
- **Innovate and Partner on Funding Opportunities.** The challenges faced by the Black community require effective partnerships and collaborations. Partner with your local public schools to see how you can contribute to building educational excellence, particularly in the schools that do not receive adequate financial support because of the state’s system of allocating dollars based on a community’s tax base.



# State of Black Georgia

- **Commit to DEI with Accountability.** Authentically and intentionally institute, innovate, and incorporate into your corporate culture Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion policies, practices, accountability, and commitments across the company. These initiatives must be ones that have teeth, are tied to executive compensation, and are sustainable. DEI strategies should include diverse leadership and recruitment of Black leaders to serve on your company board of directors. Consult DEI experts including civil rights, community, and faith-based experts in the development process. Publish the company's policies, make them widely known, and report regularly on their progress, so those charged with executing your program can be held accountable for their success.
- **Establish and expand supplier diversity.** The corporate community can make a significant impact on diversity, equity, and inclusion by establishing or expanding supplier diversity commitments and supplier development strategies and reporting publicly. Not only will this strategy generate sustainability and growth for Black and minority firms it supports, it also will create jobs and spur economic prosperity community-wide.
- **Invest in innovative and scalable Black businesses.** The corporate and business community should establish joint ventures and invest in and provide access to working and expansion capital for Black and minority entrepreneurs. The focus should be on enterprises that historically have received less than 2% of all venture capital investments each year, including companies led by Black women that receive less than 1%, according to data from Crunchbase.
- **Fund and invest times in partnerships with community and civic groups that have proven track records or clear potential to succeed in their missions.** Investigate best practices through associating with your peers or Chambers of Commerce.
- **Non-Profit Board service.** Assign high-level leadership to serve on the boards of Black-led organizations whose missions advance marginalized communities and dovetail with your corporate goals. Make substantive investments in these organizations and include them as a highly visible part of your corporate social responsibility platform.



# State of Black Ge<sup>o</sup>rgia



- **Use SOBG as a guide.** Institute laws under your jurisdictional authority that address the racial wealth gap. These could relate to homeownership opportunities and affordable rental housing as well as programs to encourage contracting with MBEs and grants and other support for schools in distressed communities.
- **Establish Citizens Review Boards.** “Best practice” community policing policies support boards and systems that give citizens an independent and safe resource to report negative encounters with law enforcement. These boards, with diverse citizen representation, are designed to provide a trusted third-party mechanism for independent investigations, with subpoena powers that make recommendations to city/county elected officials and law enforcement agency heads. They have a track record of enhancing police-community relations and community trust.
- **Support financial and other incentives that encourage law enforcement officers to live where they serve.** Inaugurate programs that enable police and fire personnel to live in the communities they serve, to build trust and understanding between residents and public servants.
- **Invest in incentives for development in economically depressed neighborhoods.** Offer tax and other incentives for affordable housing and economic development projects, grocery stores and related businesses to locate in areas that are now food deserts. Repurpose vacant buildings for recreational activities in neighborhoods that lack these services. Also, ensure equitable trash pick-up and road paving, and create amenities such as well-kept parks, playgrounds and swimming pools in communities that have suffered from disinvestment. Be aware of historical environmental injustices and ameliorate their negative affect on communities of color.
- **Increase the minimum wage to \$15.** Raise the minimum wage to \$15 per hour for your workforce and partner with local businesses to strive for the same adjustment. Seek grants to help your small business entrepreneurs stabilize and grow to expand their hiring and contribute more to the local tax base.
- **Institute government equitable Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion principles.** Develop, approve, and deploy government budgets from an equity lens; establish/expand Minority Business Enterprise Programs; and train all staff on DEI principles, audit quarterly, and reward performance. Host town hall meetings to gauge progress and measure public opinion.



# State of Black Ge<sup>Ⓜ</sup>orgia

- **Extend or expand your giving model.** Strongly consider expanding or extending your focused philanthropic investments in solutions to our state's most pressing issues around poverty and racial inequity. Whether your mission is directed toward the arts, healthcare and disabilities, environmental affairs, education, or another sector, there is room to shape initiatives that will uplift our fellow Georgia residents who are struggling to survive, overcome racial disparities, and contribute their talents as American citizens.
- **Make bigger and bolder investments in closing the racial wealth gap.** To remedy the systemic challenges that are creating and sustaining the racial wealth gap, stifling economic mobility efforts, and sustaining inter-generational poverty for Georgia families, we all must collaborate to invest more in effective measurable models and scale to move the needle of change. Consider fewer and larger investments in organizations with a track record of measurable success.
- **Meet regularly with Black leadership.** Meet with leaders of civic and community organizations and clergy to discuss partnerships for funding current programs, developing new joint initiatives, or supporting legislation that will help balance the scales, right the wrongs, and strengthen Georgia for the future.
- **Use the State of Black Georgia as a resource and guide.** Digest the information in this State of Black Georgia publication and find the best fit for you and your philanthropic gifts or direct action to engage in solutions to problems that beset urban and rural Georgia and hinder our shared progress.
- **Use your voice and position of power and influence** to be an effective advocate and leader particularly at the State Capitol, on proposed policies and laws that negatively impact Black, low income and rural communities, in the quest for economic justice and equitable opportunity for all. Silence on the issues that matter most makes all of us a part of the problem.



# State of Black GeⓂrgia

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