

# NO ONE LEFT BEHIND:

## ECONOMIC JUSTICE AND GEORGIA'S PUBLIC SECTOR WORKERS

September 2022

A Report by the International Comparative  
Labor Studies Program at Morehouse College

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MOREHOUSE

# MOREHOUSE COLLEGE

The Mission of Morehouse College is to develop men with disciplined minds who will lead lives of leadership and service. A private historically black liberal arts college for men, Morehouse realizes this mission by emphasizing the intellectual and character development of its students. This Mission has also historically been impacted by many friendships and significant contributions to their education from around the world.

Morehouse College has long been a center for the study and advancement of civil and human rights. This institution has earned a global reputation for graduating leaders, particularly in the areas of social justice and public service. Economic justice and the rights of workers have always been inextricably linked to this work.

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International Comparative Labor Studies (ICLS) was established at Morehouse College in 2017 to create new opportunities for graduates to enter careers contributing leadership, research, and organizing, with a 21st century vision for sustainable meaningful work lives for African American and all workers. As ICLS, we envision a world-class labor studies program that serves African American workers and global communities in the quest for sustainable meaningful lives and social justice. We are also working to close the gap conceptually, organizationally, and pedagogically between mental and manual labor for the cultivation and proper remuneration of all work. In the words of Morehouse Alumnus Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.:

**“All labor has dignity.”**

**We give special thanks to the Institute for Policy Studies Black Worker Initiative and the Economic Policy Institute for their support.**

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Comparative Labor Studies

# ALL LABOR HAS DIGNITY.

Martin Luther King, Jr. (Morehouse alumni) speaking to the American Federation of State  
County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)

*Memphis, Tennessee, March 18, 1968*



# INTRODUCTION

## A strong public sector in Georgia means a stronger Georgia for all.

Georgians depend on the public sector for essential services and jobs. Without a strong public sector, children in Georgia are less well-educated. Without a strong public sector, the state's courts system is less effective. Without a strong public sector, there is more unemployment and wages cannot keep up with the cost of living.

At first glance, Georgia's economy continues to recover from COVID yet below the surface too many people across Georgia are being left behind, including rural, women, Black, and working-class workers. Part of the problem is that Georgia's policy makers have ignored and underinvested in the state's public sector. Although the health of the Georgian economy benefits from a strong public sector, politicians have allowed the share of public sector workers in the Georgian economy to decline over the past 15 years. This means that women, suffer from higher joblessness. Since the start of the COVID pandemic, women's employment is down while men's employment has largely recovered. Rural Georgia also suffers from a weak public sector, the result of long-term job loss for over a decade. In addition, the population of the state has been increasing. A larger population means that there is a greater need for public sector services. This relative scarcity of public sector employees means that Georgians receive worse services and

public sector workers are functioning under increasingly stressful working conditions.

Frequent state and local budget cuts and long-term disinvestment in the public sector have eliminated many of the jobs that pay union premium wages. Overall, public sector employment is down 4.3% since the start of the pandemic in March 2020 and down almost 12% since the start of the Great Recession; that means that more than one in every ten public sector jobs has vanished over the past decade.

These public sector job losses hit workers without college degrees the hardest. The numbers of working-class jobs in state and local government dramatically declined since the start of the Great Recession—from about 151,000 in December 2007 to about 105,000 in May 2022. As a result, almost a third of working-class public sector jobs vanished during the last decade, exacerbating a similar loss in private sector job opportunities for people without a college degree. Restoring Georgia's public sector to its full size could bring jobs to rural counties and help to reverse their decline.



A strong public sector—particularly one with collective bargaining rights—creates good jobs and sets a high standard for all employers in the state. With collective bargaining rights, public sector workers have a voice on the job, and they can ensure that they and their clients (the people of Georgia) are treated well.

**Public sector collective bargaining gives people good paying jobs and is an important solution to Georgia's unequal recovery from COVID.**

### **Our specific findings include the following:**

- **Georgia's private sector recovery is leaving behind too many people,** especially workers who are Black, women, and those living in rural Georgia. Overall employment as a percentage of Georgia's growing population has struggled to return to pre-pandemic levels, largely because so many women and Black workers have yet to return to the job market. Rural Georgia has not recovered the jobs lost during the Great Recession, much less those lost to the pandemic.
- **Collective bargaining is banned for most public sector workers in Georgia**—a major reason why the Peach State has the fifth lowest union membership in the country for public sector workers.
- **Collective bargaining in the public sector creates jobs for everyone,** including White, Black, and Brown workers, especially those in the working class. Collective bargaining provides an important fair wage premium to these workers, ensuring they earn as much as 8% more than their private sector counterparts and as much 20 percentage points higher wages than public workers in states where public collective bargaining is banned.
- **Collective bargaining in the public sector also provides good jobs for working class Georgians without a college degree.** Working-class government workers actually earn 5% more than similarly situated private workers in states that require collective bargaining for the public sector, compared to 10% less in states permitting but not requiring collective bargaining, and 13% for states like Georgia that ban it altogether. In fact, the union fair wage premium for working-class public sector employees is

## **The Childcare Crisis and Public Sector Bargaining**

Georgia's public sector pre-school teachers and daycare providers are crucial to putting women back to work. Only 38% of Georgians can afford the cost of childcare.<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, only the most disadvantaged can afford to work caring for children because of the low pay. Childcare providers in Georgia have seen a spate of scandals over the past few years,<sup>28</sup> with providers being prosecuted for abuse in June, April,<sup>29</sup> and March<sup>30</sup> of this year. In January, a day care center in Richmond Hill was sued for child neglect.<sup>31</sup> Last year, the death of a 9-month-old boy led to a childcare center being investigated,<sup>32</sup> and in 2020, childcare workers were arrested for battery on a 2-year-old boy.<sup>33</sup>

Rigorous training, continuing education, and self-supervision through unions can reduce the incidence of unfit care providers. Georgia's low wages for childcare workers leads to qualified childcare professionals leaving the profession or the state altogether.<sup>34</sup> From 2017 to 2019, early education workers received an effective cut in their real wages, according to data from University of California-Berkeley.<sup>35</sup> The average wage of a preschool teacher was \$14.05 per hour, while the average wage of a childcare worker was \$9.37 per hour.

Unions that organize childcare workers fight for improved wages and higher standards and benefits on the ground.<sup>36</sup> But without public sector collective bargaining rights, it is difficult to organize these workers and improve services for Georgia's children.

## Rights on the Job, Transit Access, and Commutes

Public workers play a key role in transportation as well. Due to Section 13(c) of the Urban Mass Transportation Act of 1964, most MARTA employees have collective bargaining rights, as opposed to nearly all others who work for state and local governments in Georgia. Their union, the Amalgamated Transit Union, has been one of the most vocal advocates for compensation packages that retain qualified MARTA employees and prevent burnout and poor service and, at the federal level, for expanded mass transit funding. It showcases how workers are able to better fight for more dynamic public services when they have collective bargaining rights—just like the Atlanta firefighters union profiled in this report.

This is especially relevant in the Atlanta combined statistical area, where two-thirds of the population of Georgia lives, and which has some of the longest commutes in the country for both mass transit (54 minutes) and car (35 minutes).<sup>38</sup> With four million trips monthly,<sup>39</sup> MARTA plays a critical role in preventing further traffic in the Atlanta area, as buses and trains are able to transport many more people than cars while taking up much less space.<sup>40</sup>

In addition, research from Georgia State found that “improving access to bus transportation may assist in changing the spatial distribution of poverty and creating more equitable and inclusive cities.”<sup>41</sup>

better than for public workers with a college degree, who earn 20 percentage points less than in the private sector, even in states where collective bargaining is required.

- **Frequent state and local budget cuts and long-term disinvestment in the public sector have eliminated many of the jobs that pay union premium wages.** Overall, public sector employment is down 4.3% since the start of the pandemic in March 2020 and down almost 12% since the start of the Great Recession—meaning that more than one in every ten public sector jobs has vanished over the past decade.
- **These public sector job losses hit workers without college degrees the hardest.** The number of working class jobs in state and local government dramatically declined since the start of the Great Recession, from about 151,000 in December 2007 to about 105,000 in May 2022. As a result, almost a third of working class public sector jobs vanished during the last decade, exacerbating a similar loss in private sector job opportunities for people without a college degree.
- **Public sector collective bargaining benefits local communities.** The public sector plays an essential role in Georgia's communities, and collective bargaining magnifies the positive impact delivered by government workers in the places they live and work. Bargaining promotes community stability, boosts wealth creation, and improves the quality and cost-effectiveness of government services, especially compared to the more costly results of privatization.
- **Collective bargaining empowers women working in the public sector workforce,** including protecting women from discrimination and harassment and paying better wages. While women in the public sector still earn less than those in the private sector, collective bargaining closes this gap considerably. In states where collective bargaining is banned, female public sector workers earn 16% less than similar female workers in the private sector, but only 8% less in states where collective bargaining is required in the public sector. As a result, the union fair wage premium is 8 percentage points for women (*see Figure 19*). This is particularly relevant in light of the gender wage gap in Georgia, whereby women workers earn 80 cents for every dollar a man makes.





- **A unionized public sector plays a key role in removing barriers to an equal recovery for all Georgians.** It is critically important for rebuilding the state's economy as the pandemic wanes. In two sectors in particular, unions and organized public workers have a special role to play: childcare and transportation.

Georgia policymakers should take the following actions to strengthen collective bargaining for state and local government workers:

- **Expand collective bargaining rights to all 680,000 public employees in Georgia.**<sup>42</sup> This will ensure all public workers will benefit from the union fair wage premium—especially working class public employees with no college degree. In Virginia in 2020, the legislature passed a landmark labor rights expansion, repealing a ban on municipalities and school districts from engaging in collective bargaining.<sup>43</sup>
- **Enact merit-based staffing for public employees.** In 1996, the state passed a radical civil service reform law that, in effect, removed all new employees from the traditional civil service system and made them all "at-will" employees. Many functions, such as recruitment and classification, were decentralized to operating agencies. The Georgia legislature should repeal this law and return public servants to merit staff status.
- **Create an OSHA State plan to extend health and safety protections to state and local public workers.** This will ensure they have adequate workplace health and safety standards. Currently only private sector workers have OSHA protections because Georgia does not have a state plan.
- **Enact higher labor standards for state and local government contractors.** State, county, and municipal governments should require that the companies they contract with for services must provide certain labor standards to their workers, including good wages, health insurance, paid leave, and the absence of any labor law violations.

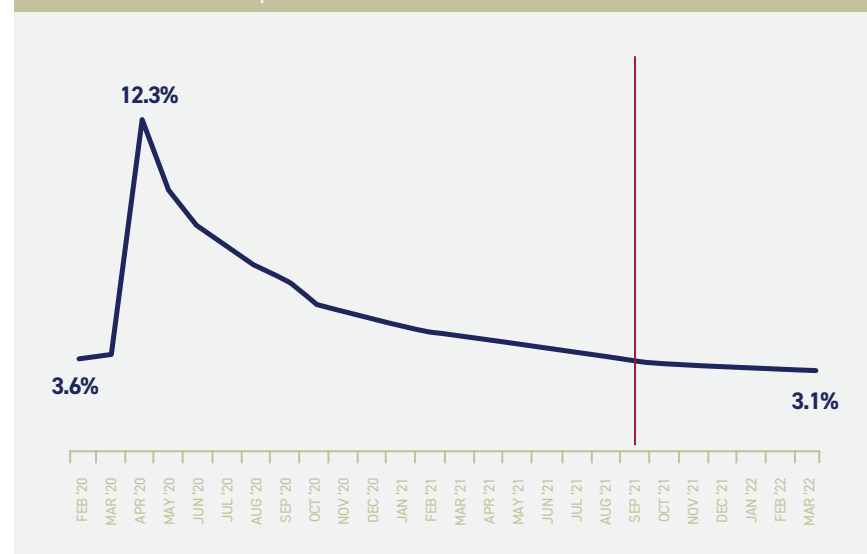
# 2 GEORGIA'S UNEQUAL RECOVERY FROM COVID-19

**Although the overall recovery looks solid, too many people across Georgia are being left behind, including rural, women, and Black workers.**

At first glance, Georgia's economy has almost fully recovered from the COVID-19 recession. After shedding nearly 668,000 jobs between February and April 2020, Georgia's employment levels returned to pre-pandemic levels by September 2021 and added an additional new 85,000 jobs by March 2022. Similarly, Georgia's unemployment rate peaked in April 2020 at 12.3% before steadily decreasing to the current 3.1% (see *Figure 1*).

Despite the sunny press releases about jobs, all is not well with Georgia's economy. Other measures of labor market health reveal deep, persistent challenges for working Georgians that continue more than two years after the pandemic began. Most ominously, labor force participation has not fully recovered, as seen in *Figure 2*. The percentage of working-age Georgians who are in the labor force—they have a job or are looking for one—is still almost a full percentage point below where it was before the pandemic began in March 2020 (62.8%). Similarly, the percentage of Georgia's population currently employed has only just now caught up to pre-pandemic levels. These two trends suggest that people still face barriers in returning to work.

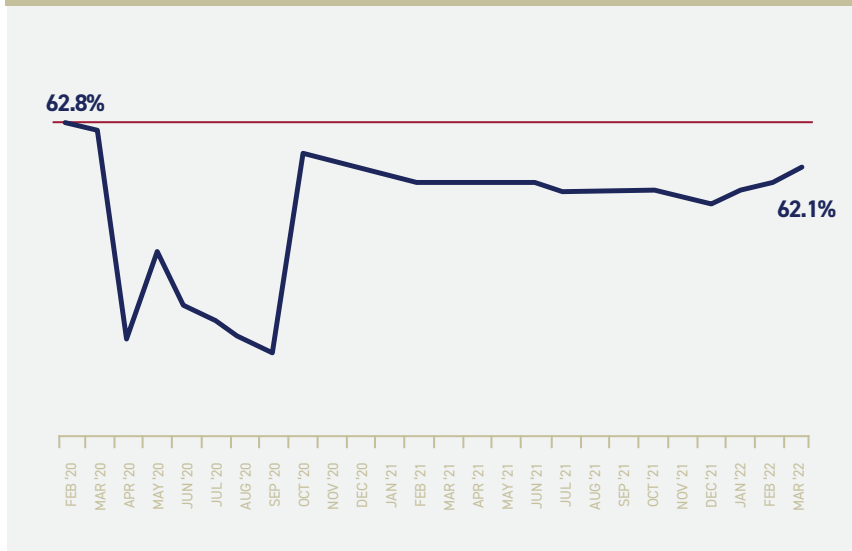
**Figure 1.** Georgia's overall unemployment rate has recovered from the pandemic



Source: Local Area Unemployment Statistics, February 2020-March 2022



**Figure 2.** Georgia's labor force participation remains below pre-pandemic levels



Source: Local Area Unemployment Statistics, February 2020-March 2022

In particular, the post-COVID-19 recovery is leaving behind women and people of color, a result of current and historical barriers that prevent them from participating fully in the economy. Looking first at gender, economic shutdowns and associated job losses during the COVID-19 recession disproportionately affected women more than men. Normal recessions typically hit industries with male-dominated employment the hardest, such as manufacturing and construction. Social distancing and economic shutdowns during the COVID recession, however, negatively impacted industries that on average employ more women—such as hospitality, retail, and health care jobs—rather than the sectors typically vulnerable to recessions.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, school and childcare closures hit working women especially hard. In one survey from 2020, nearly half of female respondents were the sole childcare provider in their home.<sup>2</sup> Another survey from 2021 reported that nearly half of working mothers took unpaid sick leave due to closed schools and childcare centers, rising to 65% and 70% for low-income and part-time working mothers, respectively.<sup>3</sup> Both of these forces combined unraveled decades of progress made by women over the post-World War II period.

**Verdailia Turner, President of the Georgia Federation of Teachers,** spoke of the tragic legacy of the failure to extend collective bargaining rights to teachers and public school employees in Georgia, and what it would mean to expand public sector bargaining rights today.

*I've been in Atlanta all of my life. I was a public school teacher, and I worked in inner-city schools. We were fighting for air conditioners, and to get teachers who were certified. In the union, we went to meetings and spoke up about asbestos. I got invited to a meeting of the (American Federation of Teachers) AFT in my early 20s. I went there and for the first time saw that teachers were treated as professionals, and I got turned on to it. The local union asked me to make calls for political folks. I wanted to do right as an organizer, and I was trained to do that. I became a co-building rep (shop steward) at my school. Then I came out of the school on a membership drive, where I recruited more people than anyone else. Every member we get we have to fight for. Because we don't have collective bargaining, our Georgia Professional Standards keep being weakened, and now the teachers don't have to be certified. They lower standards every time they have a teacher shortage. Real good teachers are leaving. Because it is not a profession anymore. Dumped on, written up, or they have to kowtow to the administration. I knew so many good people who left. Teaching used to be a ministry but it's not so much that anymore!*

## **Their ability to have a richer life has been hindered**

*We used to have community schools. Teachers and parents knew each other. The lack of collective bargaining laws affects Black Georgians, in particular. There's less money; less opportunity to be promoted or move up. Therefore, their ability to have a richer life has been hindered. The economic playing field has not been the same. To level it, you would have to have highly qualified teachers who can mentor people and mentor people out of the profession. Another requirement would be that you have a widespread curriculum. When a doctor knows his patient he's allowed to experiment. And they collaborate. Not so in teaching. A pharmacist knows their profession. Nobody's going to argue with them. Without collective bargaining, we don't have teachers as scholars who continuously learn why this particular child has Asperger's or not. Because we lack collective bargaining rights, we don't have the effectiveness to enforce what we know as professional bureaucrats do and people who are running for office. I have cousins who work in public education in New York, where they have rights—public schools there are so much more advanced.*

## You're either begging or bargaining

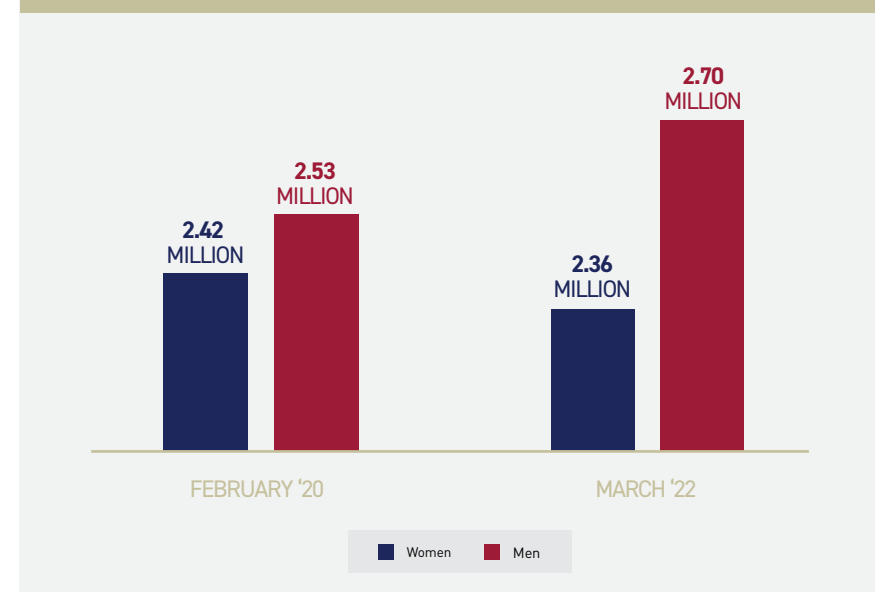
Without collective bargaining, students are cheated because the darn teachers are cheated. You're either begging or bargaining and here, we're begging. It's going to shortchange our students forever. What kind of thinkers, leaders, or problem solvers are we trying to develop into effective citizens? When you don't have collective bargaining you don't have the wages that you need or the awareness of schools that is needed in broader society. Instead, politicians decide what we should teach or do. Take the debate over critical race theory. It's a politically charged agenda that distracts from what quality education should be.



As a result, it is not surprising that women are experiencing a different (and less robust) recovery when compared to men. The total number of jobs held by women fell drastically when COVID-19 hit. Those jobs have yet to recover, and losses have continued in the past year while employment among men in Georgia has rebounded from pandemic losses and continues to expand. As seen in **Figures 3 and 4**, the total number and percentage of women employed remains well below February 2020 levels, while men have long since surpassed their pre-COVID-19 employment peak in total number and percentage. Although more men than women have historically been employed as a percentage of population, the gap widened significantly during COVID-19: men are now employed at rates about 14 percentage points higher than women in Georgia, up from about 9 points in February 2020.

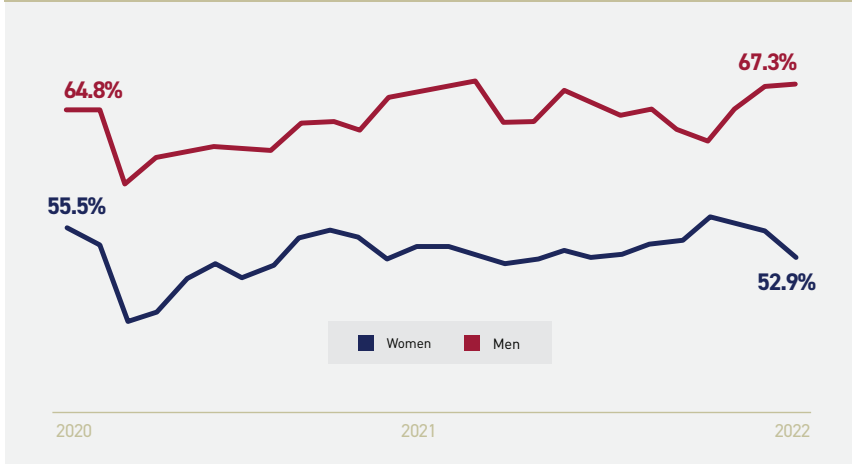
Georgia's Black workers also have not experienced the economic recovery that top-line indicators of labor market health suggest. In March 2022, Georgia's Black unemployment rate of 6.3% was the highest of the state's four largest racial groups, nearly double the 3.5% White rate and well above the rate for Hispanic workers (*see Figure 5*).

**Figure 3.** More men are employed than before the pandemic, but fewer women



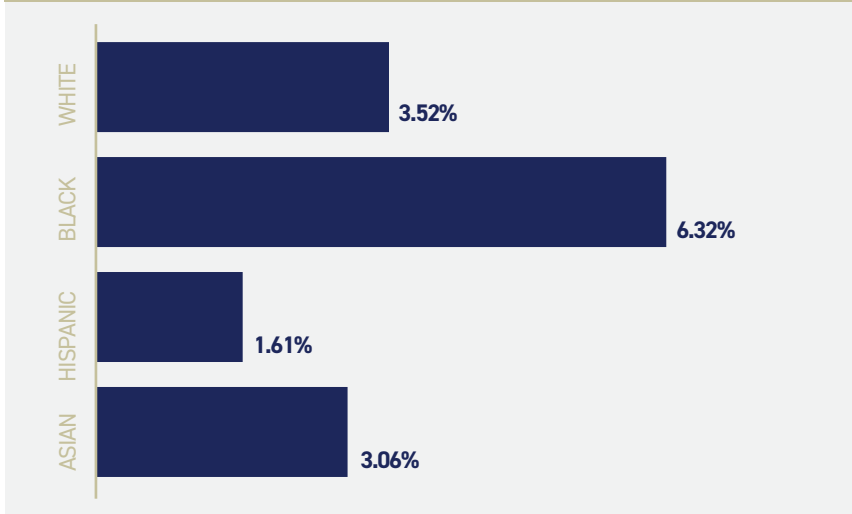
Source: Local Area Unemployment Statistics, February 2020-March 2022

**Figure 4.** Fewer women remain in the labor market than men as a percentage of Georgia's population



Source: Local Area Unemployment Statistics, February 2020-March 2022

**Figure 5.** Black unemployment rate remains elevated two years after start of pandemic



Source: Current Population Survey IPUMS microdata, March 2022

**Jill Penn is a professor of biology at Georgia Gwinnett College outside of Atlanta.** She is co-President of Georgia's newest public sector union, the United Campus Workers of Georgia (UCW), Communications Workers of America (CWA) Local 3265. Founded in 2017, the local now has over 1,000 members across Georgia's higher education system.

*When I first started at Georgia Gwinnett it was an amazing place. It was founded in 2005, and I started in 2014. They had a lot of money from the state to get started. It was a great job. I had been an adjunct professor in Massachusetts at public and private schools. I was really impressed with Georgia Gwinnett. After four years, things started to change. They all of a sudden didn't have as much money as they used to. They told us in the sciences that we had to teach more classes without an increase in pay and without a decrease in service and research. It became a completely different job. They brought us in with all these expectations of what the job was going to be and then they changed it on us. We started talking about whether or not we should form a union. And we found out that the University of Georgia (UGA) had started the United Campus Workers. What we liked about UCW was the wall-to-wall aspect, not just a bunch of professors. We liked that idea. UGA had got it going, but at Georgia Gwinnett we were the second campus to join United Campus Workers. Now we're on 20 of the 26 higher education campuses in Georgia.*

***I made it my mission to tell these legislators how poorly our college was funded***

*When we would meet with our President at Georgia Gwinnett, he would say 'this is all above me. The Board of Regents and the state legislature control everything.' So, I made it my mission to tell these legislators how poorly our college was funded. By organizing and talking with people, we discovered that it's a trend not just with professors in the sciences who teach labs to give us more work without additional pay. The trend is throughout our college and other colleges as well. For example, with our staff, we have the registrars that make sure people get registered. They are super understaffed. I talked with many of them. When somebody leaves, they are not replaced, and they end up having to take on more work. Another problem is with salary compression—new people come in and get hired at a market rate. What happens is people who have been here for 10 years get paid less than the new hires. So, the longer you are there the more dissatisfied you get. There's no respect for people who are dedicated to the college.*



**If it was the law that said we have the right to collectively bargain they would have to sit down with us.**

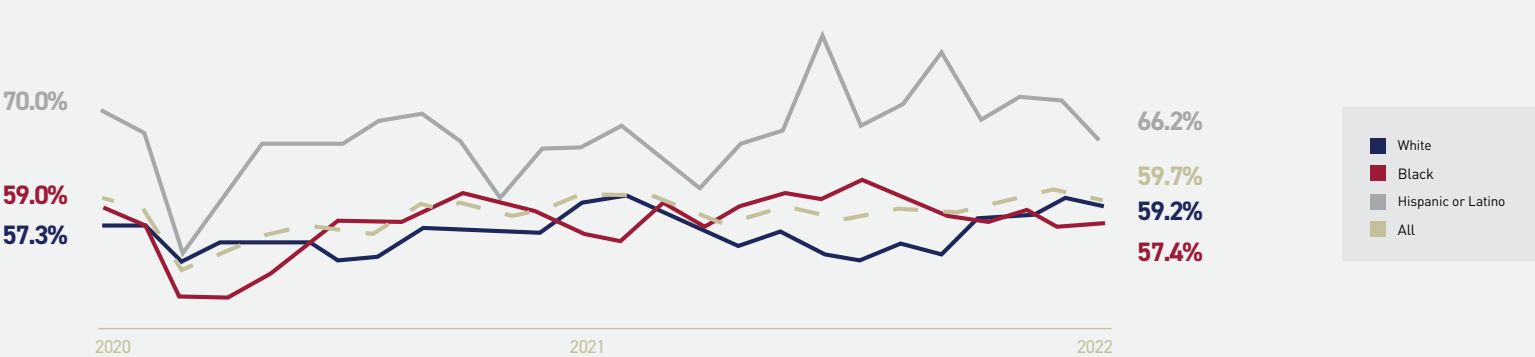
*If it was the law that said we have the right to collectively bargain they would have to sit down with us. We have no contract or anything like that. During COVID it was interesting to see because the university has contracts with Barnes & Noble, the dining hall, the companies that build and maintain the dorms. The school had to pay them—even if the dorms were closed. They're still obligated under the contract to pay these private employees all this money. If we had a contract and able to collectively bargain, our pay would be better. It would give us even more power, and allow us to build on the victories we've already won. We just won an across-the-board cost of living raise for all full-time workers in higher ed in Georgia. This was the first across-the-board COLA in 30 years. Since 1990, the legislature might budget some extra money for pay raises—then the USG would say we're only doing merit raises. For example, in my department, 99% of my faculty went above and beyond. But our chairs and deans were not allowed to give everyone a raise. We were saying that we need a COLA. Just a flat amount to everybody. We campaigned on it for many years, and then we won in this year's budget. We also got rid of a \$400 fee that all students had to pay that they had instituted in the financial crisis. Initially it started with our graduate student members, and then it grew to include everybody."*



Similarly, the percentage of the Black population in the labor force remains lower in March 2022 (57.4%) than before the pandemic (59%), while the White percentage of population in the labor force has fully recovered and is now higher than before the pandemic began (see *Figure 6*). Taken together, these two trends show that Black workers—along with workers of color more broadly—experienced a different, more intense economic recession due to COVID-19 and have a harder time climbing out. This continues a decades-old trend that long predates the pandemic: Black unemployment often climbing to double the rate of White joblessness,<sup>4</sup> which reflects historical and continuing disparities and discrimination in the labor market.<sup>5</sup> The steeper decline in the percentage of the Black and Hispanic populations that have a job compared to Whites indicates historically marginalized groups bore the brunt of negative labor market impacts during the COVID-19 recession.

In the same way that COVID-19 revealed the underlying economic challenges facing women and communities of color, **the pandemic also highlighted the economic vulnerabilities facing rural communities**, many of which have already suffered decades of job losses due to the collapse of rural manufacturing across the region. As seen in *Figure 7*, it is clear that rural communities and urban/suburban communities are experiencing radically different recoveries from COVID-19. Almost all of the state's most populated areas—Atlanta, Columbus, Augusta—have fully recovered the jobs they lost to the recession, while Georgia's rural communities, especially in Central and Southwest

**Figure 6.** Black employment remains below pre-pandemic levels



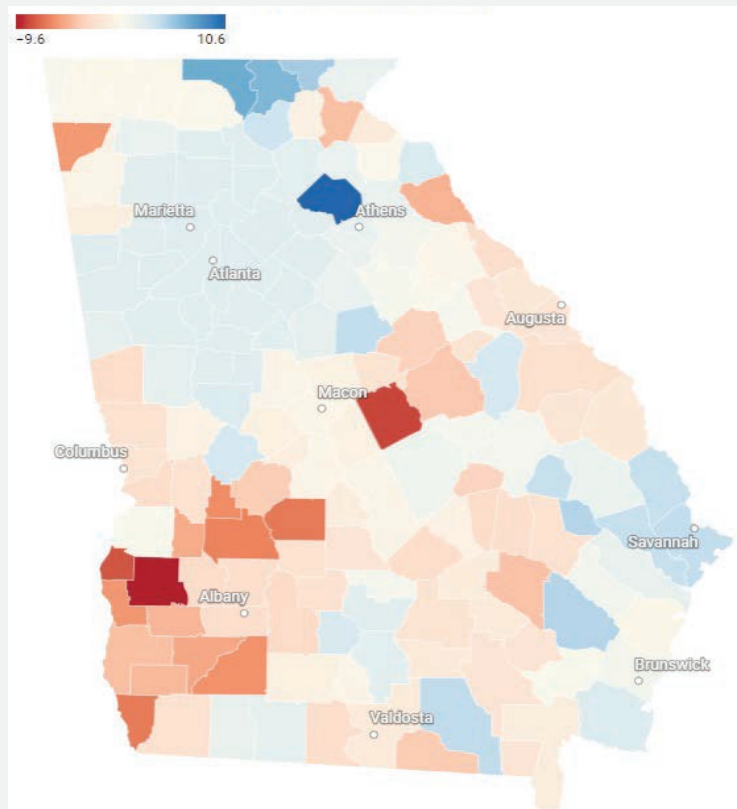
Source: Current Population Survey IPUMS microdata, March 2022

Georgia, are still struggling to replace the jobs that vanished since March 2020. Many of the same rural counties struggling to recover from COVID-19 job losses never replaced the jobs lost from the Great Recession 15 years ago.

In short, the private sector economy is not delivering for women, workers of color, and rural communities, all of whom are being left behind as Georgia struggles to recover from the devastating economic impacts of the pandemic.

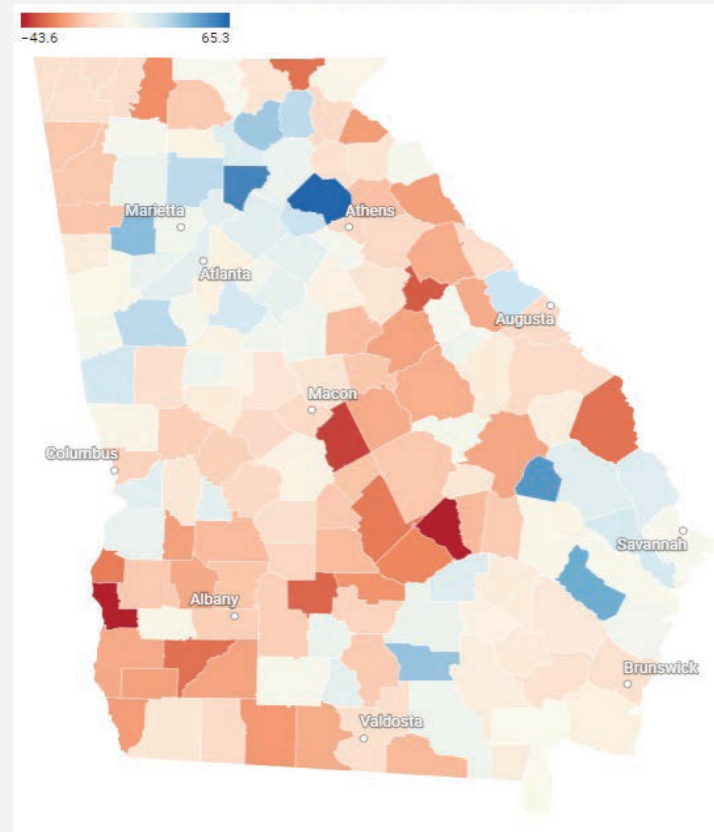
**Figure 7a.** Rural Counties in middle Georgia have yet to recover jobs lost during COVID.

**Percentage change in county employment levels since COVID  
(February 2020 to March 2022)**



**Figure 7b.** Rural Counties in middle Georgia have yet to recover jobs lost during the Great Recession.

**Percentage change in county employment levels since the Great Recession  
(December 2007 to March 2022)**



# 3 GEORGIA'S PUBLIC SECTOR WORKERS LACK SUPPORT

Georgia's state and local governments play a critical role in creating good-paying jobs for the communities who need them most, especially for rural Georgia and working-class people—Black, Brown, and White workers alike. Yet, Georgia public sector workers are denied the right to collectively bargain for their wages, salaries and benefits which is a major factor in their earnings on average 21% below those in the private sector. When jobs which can be found in the rural communities and serve society are inadequately paid it diminishes quality service and community well-being there. We suggest the solution is to protect their right to collectively bargain.

## Who are Georgia's public sector workers?

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State and local government workers play an enormously diverse role in Georgia communities. They are teachers, firefighters, and police officers. They work in childcare, healthcare, social services, mass transit, utilities, sanitation, parks, housing authorities, libraries, and museums. They play an integral role in all aspects of education, including preschool, elementary and secondary education, and higher education. They work in the justice system as police support staff, and in courts and corrections. Others work in offices as accountants, auditors, managers, city planners, attorneys, and technical experts.

The public sector plays an essential role in Georgia's communities, and **collective bargaining magnifies the positive impact delivered by government workers in the places they live and work.** Public workers provide essential services to their communities: they repair your roads, collect your trash, and respond to fires and other emergencies. They drive your buses, teach your kids, and train the next generation of plumbers, welders, teachers, and other professionals. They work in hospitals, schools, community colleges, prisons, and police stations. They work to ensure that your property remains protected against theft, violence, and fire. They clean the streets, maintain your parks, and keep your recreational sports leagues running. And they do it for the entire public, regardless of how much money or political influence you have.

**Public sector employers also provide workers with good jobs that, in turn, significantly benefit the broader community where they live.** As discussed in Section D, state and local governments pay good wages, especially for working-class employees, and particularly when they can access collective bargaining rights. At the same time, these jobs also provide key benefits that have real impacts on the community. For example, most public sector jobs provide health insurance, which ensures that workers and their families can afford basic healthcare.<sup>10</sup> In turn, family healthcare spending supports local hospitals and other health providers who rely on these revenues to stay in business. At the



**Nate Bailey, President of Atlanta Professional Firefighters Local 134**, described how he got involved in the union, how they successfully lobbied the Atlanta City Council in November 2021 to authorize collective bargaining rights for firefighters under a little-known 1971 Georgia law, and what this victory means for the first responders in his union.

*I just moved out to Canton with the child from Atlanta. I was born and raised in Georgia. I started with the Fire Department right out of high school. Now I'm in my 23rd year. I've always been a union member and supported the union functions. I started to be more involved when there was a staffing issue. I didn't have all the information on what collective bargaining was because Georgia is not a collective bargaining state. I didn't know the communication that it brings.*

## **We started thinking about collective bargaining and how important it is**

*So, we started thinking about collective bargaining and how important it is. You need collective bargaining rights when you have toxic leadership or someone who shuts out labor. The city council agreed and awarded us collective bargaining rights, which in Georgia is done through the Firefighter Mediation Act. We had a lot of ideas to save funding, changing health insurance, giving people incentive for being healthier. We had spent the last seven or eight years building trust with elected officials before we had our victory. We're negotiating our first contract now and our main priorities are making the job more enjoyable and getting creative with incentives. So far it's working out.*

same time, public sector jobs with health insurance ensures that even the lowest paid employees and their families will not have to use Medicaid, the governmental health program funded by state and federal dollars; this saves the Georgia state budget billions of dollars every year.

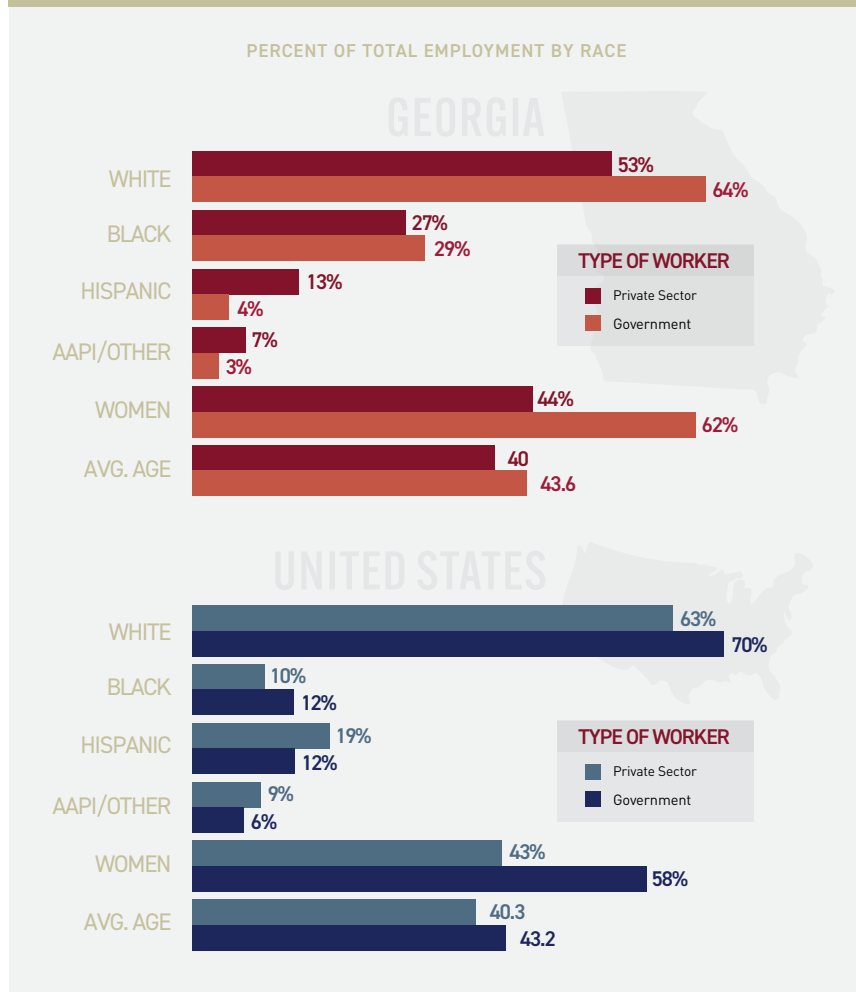
**In addition, government jobs create wealth in their communities.** Public employees have access to retirement savings and pension packages that are often much less generous (or even non-existent) in the private sector, giving public workers and their families significant opportunities to build wealth that will ultimately be spent in their communities. In addition, public sector wages provide enough of a stable income to help workers and their families (especially those in the lowest paid occupations or job classifications) "get their foot in the door" of homeownership, the single biggest source of wealth-building in the country. According to recent studies, public workers own lower-cost homes on average than private workers, suggesting that lower-income families with public sector jobs have an easier time buying into the real estate market (especially less expensive homes) than their private sector counterparts who are often forced to rent rather than buy.<sup>11</sup>

**Public sector workers stay in their communities longer, providing crucial stability to their neighborhoods, towns, and counties**—a critical antidote to the broader market forces driving so many people away from smaller places to the major metros in Atlanta, Columbus, Augusta, or out of state. Recent studies have shown that public workers are far more likely to stay in their communities for 10 years or longer than their private sector counterparts who often must leave to find better jobs elsewhere. Moreover, the longevity these public workers bring to their communities has been found to reduce crime, increase mutual support and cohesion within neighborhoods, and boost overall civic participation in the places where they live.<sup>12</sup>

Georgia's public sector workers are diverse in other ways as well. More than six out of ten public sector employees are women because so many are working as teachers or educators in the public school system. In addition, about 64% of state and local government employees are White, slightly less than the national average (*see Figure 8*), while 29% of public sector workers are Black and the remaining 7% are Hispanic, and Asian and Pacific Islander. Both Black and White workers are over-

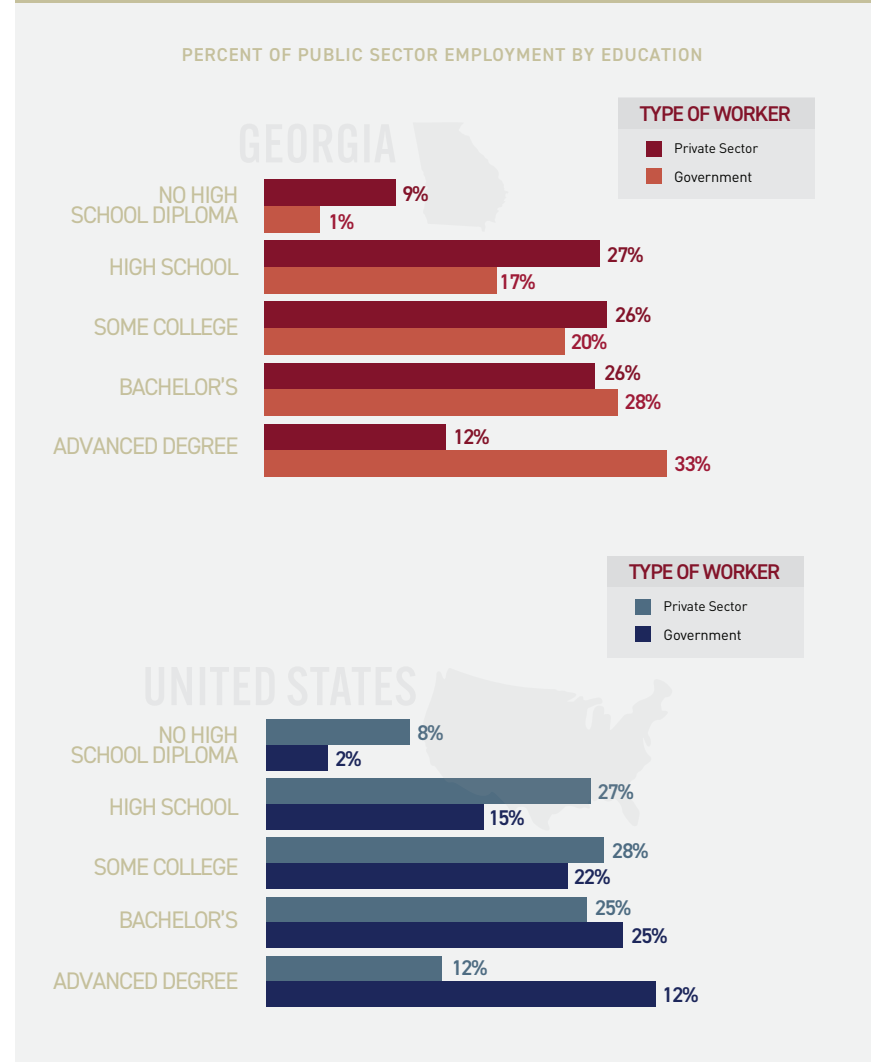
represented in government employment compared to the private sector. This is likely due to two different factors: as seen in *Figure 9*, a majority of public sector workers (62%) have college and graduate degrees, which Hispanics typically possess in lesser numbers, while long-standing local government anti-discrimination hiring policies have opened doors for Black and women workers in the public sector who may find them less open in the private sector.

**Figure 8.** Black workers and women more likely to be employed in public sector



Source: Economic Policy Institute analysis of U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey microdata, pooled years 2015–2019.

**Figure 9.** Almost 4 out of 10 public sector employees are working class, do not have college degrees



Statistics shown are for wage and salary workers ages 18–64 working 35 or more hours per week; percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Source: Economic Policy Institute analysis of U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey microdata, pooled years 2015–2019.

Yolanda Jackson, a food service manager for Atlanta Public Schools and member of American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 1644, does have collective bargaining rights because her job has been outsourced since 1999. But, she says, the opportunity to return to being a public sector employee, but with full collective bargaining rights, would transform her life at work.

*I've been with Atlanta Public Schools since 2001. I'm also the chapter chair for AFSCME for Southwest Food Services which is contracted out of APS. I love doing what I do. I love feeding the kids. My passion is cooking anyway. I love to see the kids eating. As long as they are eating, I'm satisfied. My grandkids are in Atlanta Public Schools too. By being in the union you have someone who will fight for you and protect you if you speak out for the right things. Right now, we are short-staffed. We're overworking ourselves. If I don't speak up about what's going on, management is not going to do anything about it. It would change a lot if we had collective bargaining, that we could go through and speak up on our behalf with the school district. We would get a lot of things done. Working in the cafeteria would be a better and safe environment for the workers. Right now, some of the schools don't have a safe working place. If we ever bargained with the district directly, we could speak up for ourselves so we could get working equipment and better wages. We need that in the South.*

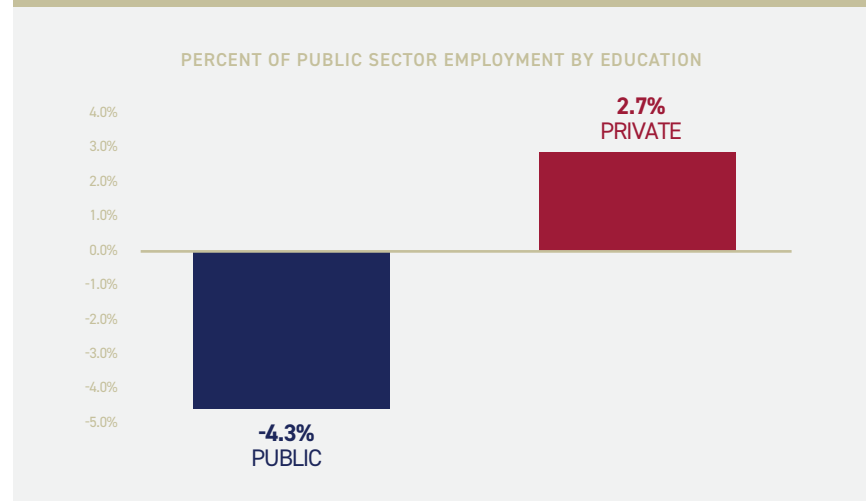
## **They were treating us like we did not exist**

*We are the union. If we don't come together as one, then how do you expect the people we work for to give us respect? If they see you all against the union they're going to go against you. I got involved in the union because they were treating us like we did not exist in the nutrition department. So, I got involved, we fought for raises because we didn't make anything. We could speak out for what was right and what was wrong. Being in the union you can meet a lot of people and learn a lot—that's how you get your growth.*

## **Budget cuts reduce employment, harm rural Georgia**

Unfortunately, frequent state and local budget cuts and long-term disinvestment in the public sector have eliminated many of these jobs, which play a critical role in rural Georgia communities. Overall, public sector employment is down 4.3% since the start of the pandemic in March 2020 and down almost 12% since the start of the Great Recession—meaning that more than one in every ten public sector jobs has vanished over the past decade (see Figures 10 and 11), while private sector jobs are up 2.7%.

**Figure 10.** Public sector employment yet to recover from COVID-19 job losses



Source: Current Employment Survey, percent change in public sector employment.

Communities in rural Georgia have borne the brunt of these budget cuts and public sector job losses. Local governments, including public school systems, are often the largest employer in many communities, especially in rural counties without an urban core where more than half of the total workforce is employed by the public sector (see Figure 12). Years of budget cuts have significantly reduced the public sector workforce, significantly hurting the ability of local communities to restore employment in the years since the Great Recession (see Figure 13).



## Who We Do Want to Fund: Fire Fighters as First Responders

*The biggest challenge we have right now is the misunderstanding of what we do; the stresses we have, how much responsibility every city and county has put on us. It's why I wanted to be union president, to show the public what we do: we're running fires, medical calls, hazmat calls. We have multiple professions under one umbrella. When we say we need funding that's what we mean. We have to wear different uniforms for different calls. Firefighters have become very valuable because we carry so many specialties.*

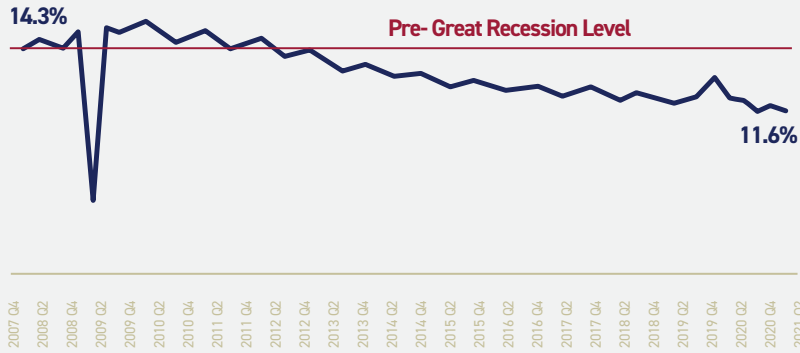
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*The majority of all of our firefighters are in the union. My goal as president is to get them involved in the contract, get a lot more input and motivation with the process, especially with Gen Z, and that helps with our retention. Face-to-face organizing is by far the best way to get the ask. You go to the firehouse, sit in front of somebody, explain how important it is, and get a commitment to help with the cause.*

”



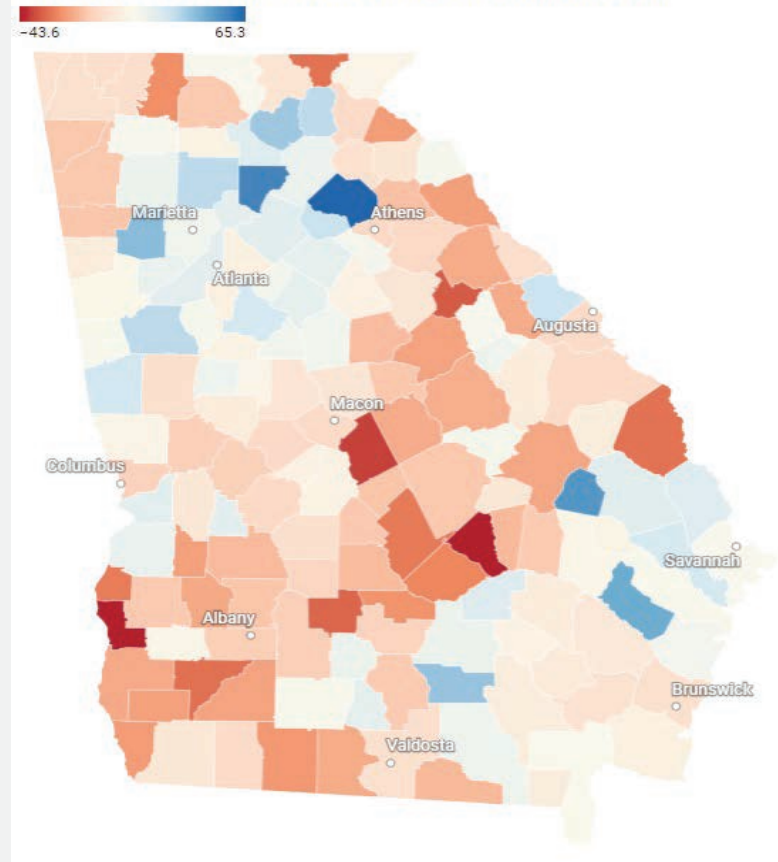
**Figure 11.** Georgia's public sector share of employment is yet to recover from Great Recession



Source: Current Population Survey IPUMS microdata

**Figure 13.** Few counties have recovered jobs lost in the Great Recession

**Percentage change in county employment levels since the Great Recession (December 2007 to March 2022)**



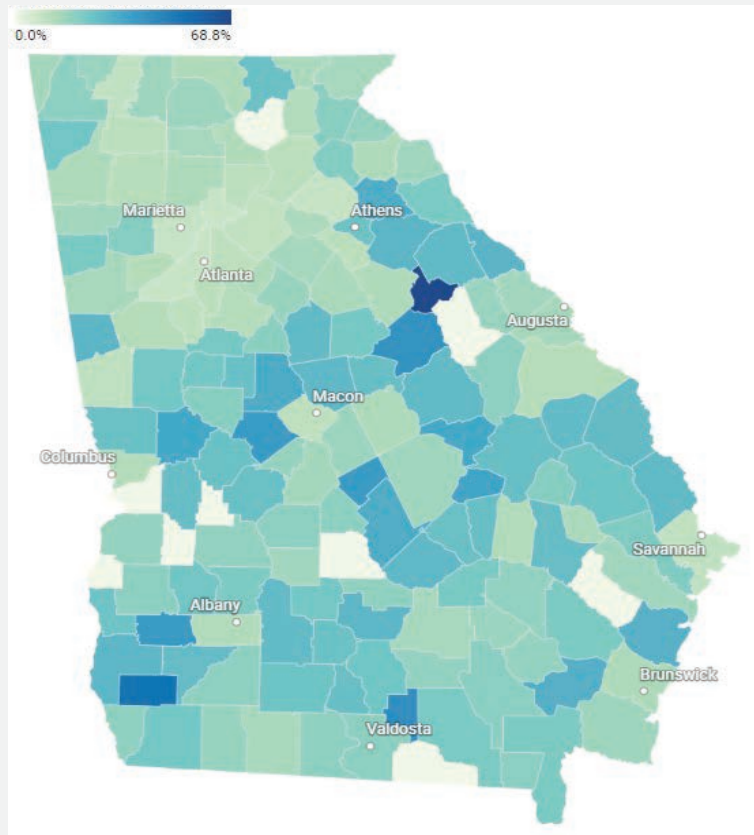
Source: Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, December 2007 to March 2022





**Figure 12.** Public sector is major employer for many Georgia communities

**Public Sector Employment as share of total employment by county**



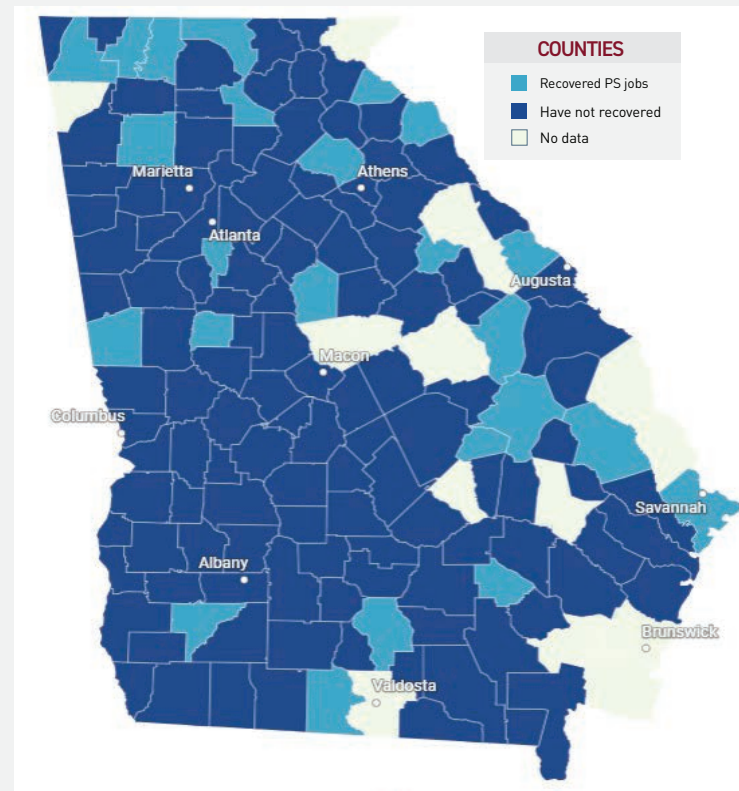
Source: Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, December 2021

Comparing the two maps, it is clear that the counties most reliant on public sector jobs (e.g., where public sector workers make up a larger share of total employment) have had the hardest time recovering the jobs lost during the Great Recession, more than a decade ago. These low-recovery counties are also many of the same communities that have yet to replace the jobs lost during the COVID-19 pandemic, despite rapid private sector job growth.

In short, the private sector has not been able to bring jobs back to local communities, especially in rural Georgia. Public sector investment is essential to ensuring local communities fully recover from COVID-19; only 24 counties in Georgia have fully recovered the public sector jobs they lost during the pandemic. The overwhelming majority of those that have not are rural counties in Middle and South Georgia (see Figure 14).

**Figure 14.** Only 24 Georgia counties have recovered all the government jobs lost during the pandemic

**Percentage change in public sector county employment levels since COVID (March 2020 to March 2022)**



Source: Source: Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, March 2020 to March 2022



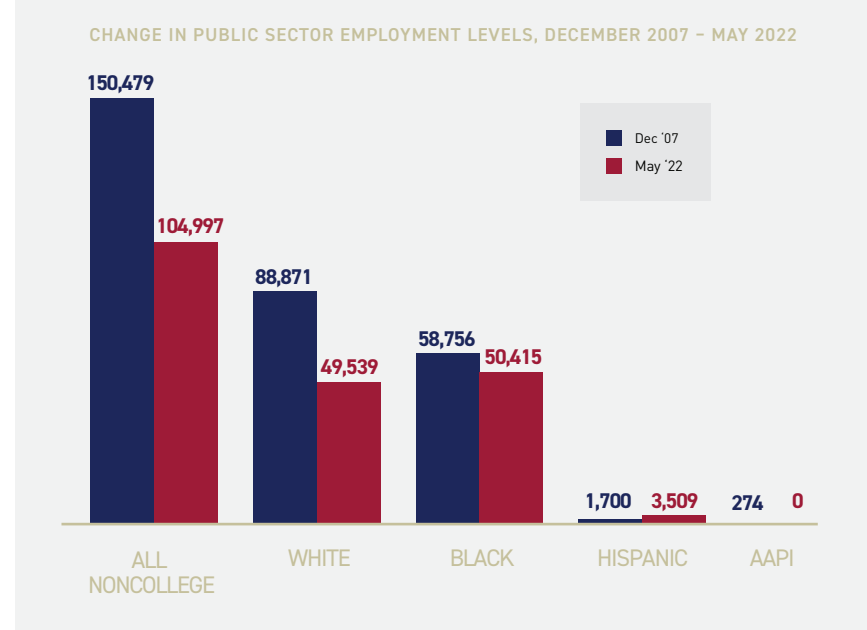
## Budget cuts kill working class jobs

Despite the prevalence of college-educated people working in the public sector, *state and local government jobs also offer a critical pathway to middle class prosperity for working-class people with no college degree.* Almost one out of five public sector workers in Georgia does not have a college degree and does not need one to do their jobs—a group we define here as “working-class.” (See Figure 9).

Public sector job losses hit workers without college degrees the hardest. The number of working-class jobs in state and local government dramatically declined since the start of the Great Recession, from about 151,000 in December 2007 to about 105,000 in May 2022. As a result, almost a third of working-class public sector jobs vanished during the last decade, exacerbating a similar loss in private sector job opportunities for people without a college degree. The loss of these good-paying public sector jobs hit White working-class workers the hardest: they saw their employment shrink by almost half over the past decade, from almost 89,000 to just under 50,000. Meanwhile, working-class job losses in the public sector also affected Black workers, who saw their non-college employment shrink by about 8,300 since 2007. At the same time, however, working-class Hispanics in the public sector, whose representation had been below their population proportion, saw their employment increase by more than double—from 1,700 in 2007 to 3,509 in 2022 (see Figure 15).

Taken together, these trends reveal an ongoing hollowing-out of the public sector that resulted from explicit policy choices by state and local governments since 2011 to prioritize tax cuts and budget cuts over public sector jobs and services. Some think cutting public sector jobs miraculously adds jobs to the private sector. But no, it just shrinks the overall pool of available jobs, especially for working class people.

Figure 15. Noncollege public sector employment has fallen dramatically since the Great Recession



Source: Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages





# COLLECTIVE BARGAINING GIVES BETTER WAGES TO ALL PUBLIC EMPLOYEES, ESPECIALLY WORKING-CLASS WORKERS

## Collective bargaining in the public sector creates good jobs that benefit workers at every level of education, especially working-class, noncollege workers

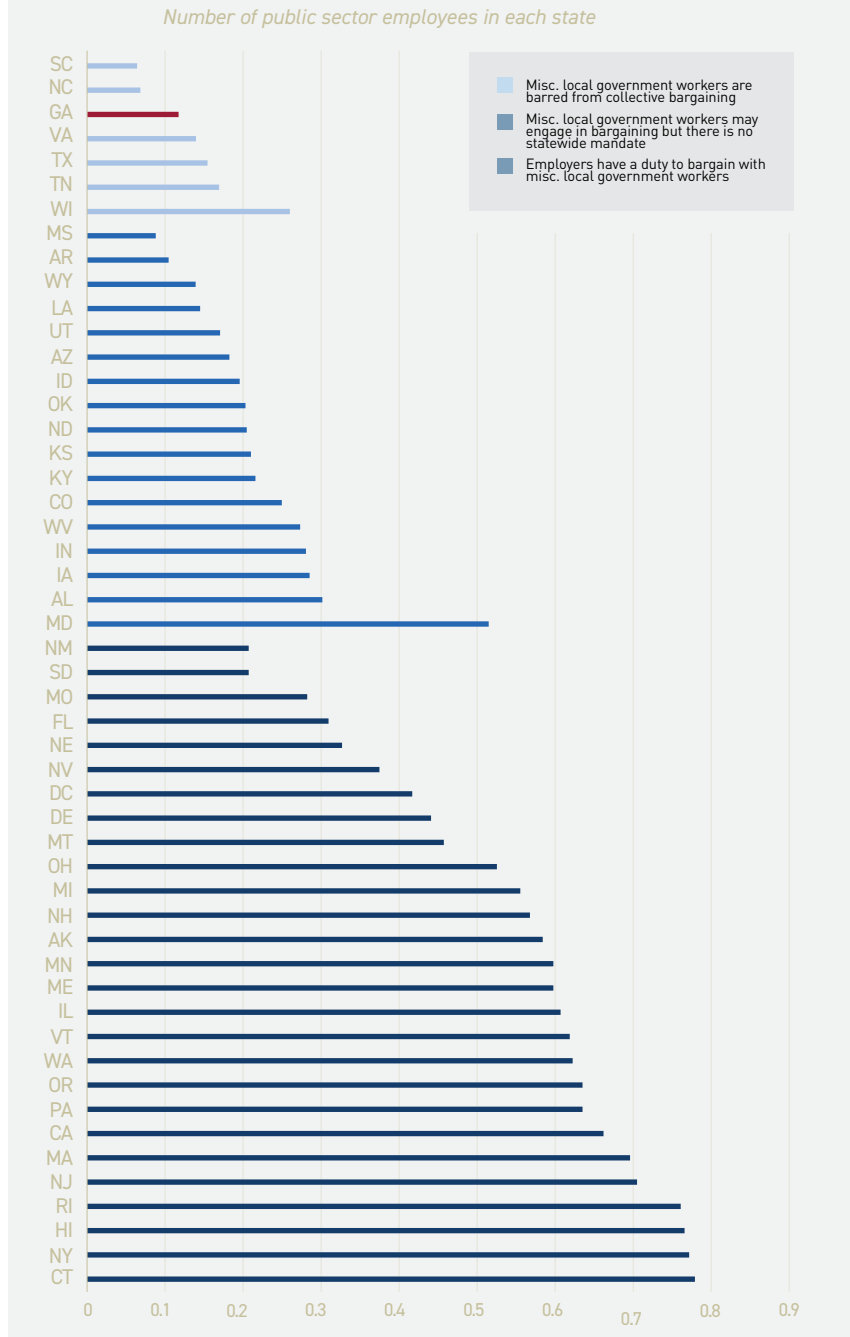
Most importantly, unionized workers across public and private sectors earn over 13% more than nonunionized workers doing the same jobs with the same levels of education and experience every year<sup>6</sup> and enjoy an hourly fair wage premium of 10% compared to similarly situated workers.<sup>7</sup> In addition to better wages, collective bargaining also provides employees with strong workplace protections against sexual harassment, unsafe working conditions, and employer retaliation, while simultaneously ensuring they have better access to pensions, health insurance, and job training than their counterparts who lack union coverage.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the benefits, Georgia has the fifth lowest percentage of public sector workers who belong to a union in the country; only North Carolina, South Carolina, Mississippi, and Arkansas have lower public sector union membership. This is almost certainly due to Georgia state laws that prohibit collective bargaining by state and local government employees. (While they can legally join unions, public sector employees

are not allowed to bargain collectively with their employers. It is their coming together with one voice and having professional representation for contracts that give workers in unions their strength. As seen in *Figure 16*, Georgia is one of seven states that has this blanket ban on collective bargaining in the public sector (they prohibit it). Meanwhile, another 17 states *permit* collective bargaining in the public sector (sometimes with various restrictions) and the remaining half of states go a step further and *require* local governments to bargain collectively with their employees.

Bottom line, the more protective of the rights to collective bargaining in the public sector are the laws, the better the wages these workers earn. In effect, collective bargaining gives public sector employees a significant and meaningful fair wage premium when compared to government workers without access to collective bargaining and (in some cases) ensures that public workers actually earn more than similarly situated private sector employees.

**Figure 16.** States that ban or limit collective bargaining rights for government workers have fewer union members



Source: Current Population Survey IPUMS microdata, 2015-2019

Generally, government employees earn about 21% less than private employees in Georgia—a gap that is significantly worse in the Peach State than in the nation as a whole, suggesting that Georgia considerably underpays its public employees in comparison to other states (see *Figure 17* for the results of our analysis, which considered arrange of control variables; see Appendix for details). But collective bargaining closes this gap and ensures higher wages for public workers. As seen in *Figure 11*, states like Georgia that ban bargaining in the public sector have government workers' wages that are 19% lower than similarly situated private sector workers, while states that permit it pay 16% less and states that require it pay just 9% less. While it is true that collective bargaining does not eliminate the pay gap altogether for all public sector workers, it does reduce it considerably, demonstrating that collective bargaining pays government workers a clear "union fair wage premium." This premium is the difference between the wage gap in states prohibiting bargaining and the gap in states that require bargaining, in this case equal to about 10 percentage points. As a result, we can say the public sector collective bargaining pays unionized workers 10 percentage points more than they would otherwise make in states where bargaining is prohibited.<sup>9</sup>

### Collective bargaining is good for White, Black, and Hispanic workers alike

Collective bargaining leads to equitable wages for all public workers, regardless of race (see *Figure 17*). White public workers in states where public sector bargaining is prohibited earn wages that are 25% less than similarly situated private sector workers, compared to 15% lower in states where collective bargaining is required—a 10-percentage point union fair wage premium. Thanks to active nondiscrimination policies, collective bargaining in the public sector especially benefits Black workers, who move from receiving 10.7% lower wage than similarly situated private workers in states where collective bargaining is banned to earning 5.8 percent higher wages than their private sector counterparts in states where bargaining is required—a 16-percentage point union fair wage premium). Hispanic workers receive an even greater fair wage premium of 21 percentage points. In fact, collective bargaining ensures that Black and Hispanic workers in the public sector actually earn between 6 and 9 percentage points more than their private sector counterparts.



Figure 17. Collective bargaining especially benefits all workers, especially Black and Hispanic

PUBLIC SECTOR WAGES AS A PERCENTAGE OF PRIVATE SECTOR WAGES

RACE / ETHNICITY	COLLECTIVE BARGAINING		
	Banned	Permitted	Required
WHITE	-25.2%	-20.3%	-15.0%
BLACK	-10.7%	-4.3%	5.8%
HISPANIC	-12.5%	-5.4%	8.6%
AAPI/OTHER	-24.9%	-18.9%	-11.9%

Notes: Strength of collective bargaining rights is based on rights accorded to miscellaneous local government workers in 2015-2019.

Source: Economic Policy Institute analysis of U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey microdata, pooled years 2015-2019.



## Collective bargaining is good for working class public employees

Collective bargaining in the public sector pays a fair wage premium across all levels of education, and especially for those without a college degree, those classified as the "working class." Working-class government workers actually earn 5% more than similarly situated private workers in states that require collective bargaining for the public sector, compared to 10% less in states permitting but not requiring collective bargaining, and 13% for states like Georgia that ban it altogether. In fact, the union fair wage premium for working-class public sector employees is better than for public workers with a college degree, who earn 20 percentage points less than in the private sector, even in states where collective bargaining is required (see Figure 18).

Figure 18. Collective bargaining rights close wage gaps between public and private workers across all educational attainment levels, especially for those with no college degree

PUBLIC SECTOR WAGES AS A PERCENTAGE OF PRIVATE SECTOR WAGES

Education	GEOGRAPHY		COLLECTIVE BARGAINING		
	U.S.	Georgia	Banned	Permitted	Required
ALL	-13%	-21%	-19%	-16%	-9%
NO BACHELOR'S	-2%	-15%	-13%	-10%	5%
BACHELOR'S	-23%	-29%	-29%	-23%	-20%

Notes: Strength of collective bargaining rights is based on rights accorded to miscellaneous local government workers in 2015-2019.

Source: Economic Policy Institute analysis of U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey microdata, pooled years 2015-2019.

# PUBLIC SECTOR COLLECTIVE BARGAINING BENEFITS LOCAL COMMUNITIES


Finally, **communities as a whole benefit when public sector workers have the ability to bargain collectively** because bargaining improves the cost effectiveness and quality of the services local governments deliver to their residents in the following ways:

- **Collective bargaining in the public sector saves taxpayers money while giving higher quality services.** As seen in the private prisons example in Sidebar 1, paying private contractors to administer prisons costs significantly more than public sector agencies delivering those services themselves, while news reports continually describe poor conditions for prison employees and the imprisoned alike. Privatization of government services has similar consequences in other service areas as well—from utilities (where for-profit water management companies charge rates 60% higher than utilities owned by the public sector)<sup>13</sup> to schools (where bus and other contractors routinely cost school districts millions of dollars more than projected).<sup>14</sup>
- **Unions play important roles in halting privatization,** both through collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) with local governments that

## Unions fix the problems of private prisons

One illustration of community gains from public sector collective bargaining involves the criminal justice system. Georgia has nine private prisons across the state—six with CoreCivic (formerly the Corrections Corporation of America, or CCA), and three with the GEO Group. Five of them receive detainees through the State of Georgia, while the rest are immigration detention centers contracting with the federal government.<sup>9</sup>

These prisons have been rife with problems. A 2018 audit found that Georgians pay \$49.07 per day per prisoner for private prisons, while state-run prisons are paid just \$44.56 per day—a 9% drop. The higher costs for private prisons in Georgia squares with national trends. Meanwhile, in July 2021, a CoreCivic guard was found to have been leading a drug trafficking organization.



No organization has been more vocal in their critiques of private prisons and stopping potential privatizations than the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), which represents correctional workers around the country. AFSCME has led campaigns against private prisons since 1984.<sup>22</sup> Numerous other public sector unions have led campaigns against private prisons. Since 2019, AFSCME members in New Mexico—who have collective bargaining rights—have been able to successfully convert three private prisons into state-run facilities.<sup>23</sup> The labor movement also played a major role in ensuring that Presidents Obama and Biden took steps to reign in private prisons at the federal level, which suffer from the same cost and quality problems as private prisons in Georgia.

Unions in the public sector routinely negotiate anti-privatization language in their collective bargaining agreements. And even when public services are privatized, unions are typically the best advocates for ensuring that quality does not deteriorate and, ultimately, for the return of services to public control, as Yolanda Jackson's experience shows.

prohibit this kind of contracting-out and through counter-mobilization and advocacy where CBAs are in force.

- **Unions provide strong training programs that help public workers do their jobs better, improving the quality and efficiency of services.** “For workers, union involvement in training and professional development helps to ensure that training is connected to a job or advancement opportunity as well as industry-recognized credentials.”<sup>15</sup> This can include both lower paid occupations, like gardening (an example includes the Laborers’ International Union of North America [LIUNA] gardening apprenticeship with the City of Phoenix) and homecare services (Service Employees International Union [SEIU] runs a program for Washington State), and higher paid occupations like welding or the building trades. Better trained employees deliver services more efficiently and effectively than those without training, and union contracts ensure public workers can enter and complete these programs.
- **Strong unions in the public education sector are associated with better student performance.**<sup>16</sup> Recent studies have found that collective bargaining rights for teachers improves student test scores in both middle-class and low-income school districts.<sup>17</sup> This is probably due to the fact that states with strong collective bargaining rights for teachers likely have greater quality teacher retention than those that do not. This suggests that teachers’ unions do a better job of ensuring that education dollars actually flow to classrooms than can state education departments alone. As a consequence, a recent study found that “a 10 percent increase in per pupil spending each year for all 12 years of public school leads to 0.31 more completed years of education, about 7 percent higher wages, and a 3.2 percentage point reduction in the annual incidence of adult poverty.”<sup>18</sup> Three out of the four Georgia public sector union leaders that we interviewed work in education—a professor in higher education, a longtime teacher in Georgia public schools, and a food service worker for public schools. All of them describe fighting for a better education system in Georgia. In the case of the United Campus Workers of Georgia, they successfully won the elimination of a \$450 per semester fee charged to all University of Georgia students, reducing student debt accumulation. The Georgia Federation of Teachers and AFSCME Local 1644, meanwhile, have fought against privatization and for strong standards in Georgia’s public schools. The route to a future where Georgia has an excellent public K-12





and higher education system runs through these women and the unions that they lead.

- **Collective bargaining for teachers especially benefits rural school districts.** Rural public school students in Georgia—around half a million strong and a bit over 1 out of every 5 students in the state—could particularly benefit from collective bargaining for teachers and all public education employees. Current outcomes for rural schools in Georgia are poor, with rural students’ performance on national standardized tests being among the lowest in the nation, according to research from the Rural School and Community Trust.<sup>19</sup>
- **Unions reduce inequality.** Because unions bring ordinary people together to fight for their rights, they balance unequal power relations in society. Given that Georgia has the 7th-highest inequality rate in the country, bringing about this balance is incredibly important.<sup>20</sup>





# 6 COLLECTIVE BARGAINING EMPOWERS WOMEN IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR WORKFORCE

## Collective bargaining supports and empowers women working in the public sector.

Most critically, collective bargaining gives female government workers a significant fair wage premium compared to other similarly situated women working in the private sector. While women in the public sector still earn less than those in the private sector, collective bargaining closes this gap considerably. In states where collective bargaining is banned, female public sector workers earn 16% less than similar female workers in the private sector, but only 8% less in states where collective bargaining is required in the public sector. As a result, the union fair wage premium is eight percentage points for women (see Figure 19). This is particularly relevant in light of the gender wage gap in Georgia, whereby women workers earn .80 cents for every dollar a man makes.

Due in part to the union fair wage premium, “public sector unions are crucial to the economic security and equality of working women, who make up a majority of the union-represented public sector workforce,” according to a recent report from the National Women’s Law Center.

The report also found that women members of public sector unions benefit from greater economic stability than their nonunion peers, have higher rates of health insurance coverage, and greater wage equity relative to male peers.<sup>24</sup> Given that Georgia has the third lowest<sup>25</sup> rate of health insurance coverage for women in the country, the power of unions to bargain for lower premiums and better coverage<sup>26</sup> is particularly important.

Figure 19. Women’s public sector earnings – percent below private sector

PUBLIC SECTOR WAGES AS A PERCENTAGE OF PRIVATE SECTOR WAGES

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING			
Sex of Worker	Banned	Permitted	Required
MALE	-22%	-17%	-8%
FEMALE	-16%	-14%	-8%

- Allan Freyer

Source: Economic Policy Institute analysis of U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey microdata, pooled years 2015-2019.

# 7 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS: STRENGTHEN PUBLIC SECTOR COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AND ENSURE A BROADLY SHARED RECOVERY FOR ALL GEORGIANS

**Georgia relies on the public sector for good-paying jobs, quality services, and pathways to prosperity for working class people. Collective bargaining magnifies these positive impacts for communities and public sector workers alike. Georgia policymakers should take the following actions to strengthen collective bargaining for state and local government workers:**

- **Expand collective bargaining rights to all 680,000 public employees in Georgia.** This will ensure that all public workers will benefit from the union fair wage premium—especially working-class public employees with no college degree. In 2020, the Virginia legislature passed landmark labor rights expansion, repealing a ban on municipalities and school districts from engaging in collective bargaining.
- **Enact merit-based staffing for public employees.** In 1996, the state passed a radical civil service reform law that, in effect, removed all new employees from the traditional civil service system and made them all “at-will” employees. Many functions, such as recruitment and classification, were decentralized to operating agencies. The Georgia legislature should repeal this law and return public servants to merit staff status.
- **Create an OSHA State plan to extend health and safety protections to state and local public workers.** This will ensure they have adequate workplace health and safety standards. Currently, only private sector workers have OSHA protections because Georgia does not have a state plan.
- **Enact higher labor standards for state and local government contractors.** State, county, and municipal governments should require that the companies they contract with for services must provide certain labor standards to their workers, including good wages, health insurance, paid leave, and the absence of any labor law violations.



## APPENDIX

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

## Our estimates of the pay gaps between private and public sector workers in Sections C, D, and F relied on the following analysis conducted by the Economic Policy Institute:

First, we looked at the strength of collective bargaining rights based on rights accorded to miscellaneous local government workers in 2015–2019. Data are from the 50 U.S. states and District of Columbia, with states grouped by the strength of collective bargaining in each state. Banned states are those in which miscellaneous local government workers are barred from engaging in collective bargaining. Permitted states are those in which local government entities may engage in collective bargaining with miscellaneous government workers but there is no statewide mandate. Required states are those in which local government entities are required to engage in collective bargaining with miscellaneous local government workers.

Second, we estimated the pay gap—the difference in weekly earnings of full-time state and local government workers ages 18–64 compared with those of their private-sector counterparts, controlling for education, age, hours worked, state, and year using regression analysis.

In all regression results reported here, the dependent variable is the natural logarithm of annual earnings and the baseline (the omitted category—not shown) is the earnings of private sector workers without high school diplomas. In regressions that include demographic controls, the baseline is the earnings of male, White, non-Hispanic, nonimmigrant private sector workers without high school diplomas.



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Jehwty, [or Thoth] in the African tradition, was the inventor of literacy. . . . He worked as part of a group of four: two sisters, two males, ...together dubbed the 'beautiful ones'... complementing, reinforcing and balancing each other ... resulted in life-changing innovations in medicine, architecture, law, the arts and the sciences. It was the habit of the group... to conduct experiments ...finding out through measurement and evaluation how greatly or how little any change in methods might affect ordinary routines like farming, animal husbandry, building, healing and government. Work for them was not a curse. It was an activity logically inseparable from life. ... It was the challenge of the group ... to turn work away from drudgery into bearable routine, perhaps even—why not?—into something enjoyable.

Ayi Kwei Armah, Myth.  
*History, Philosophy and Literature: The African Record*

