THE GEORGIA ECONOMIC MOBILITY PLAN

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Paid for by Stacey Abrams for Governor
Stacey Abrams has a vision for Georgia where equality fosters prosperity, and where everyone has the opportunity to succeed—not just survive. That is why she is running for Governor of our state.

Georgia families deserve a leader who will invest in every person, and who has an economic mobility vision that will increase prosperity, lift families from poverty, reduce income inequality, and ensure a fair and inclusive economy for all Georgians. Abrams is an entrepreneur who has helped small businesses in Georgia create and retain thousands of jobs. As a nonprofit leader, she employed low-income Georgians to help sign up their communities for health care and register under-served communities to vote. During her tenure as Georgia House Minority Leader, she developed and promoted policy solutions to serve our families.

Stacey Abrams has the experience to build a fair, thriving economy where every hardworking family has the chance to succeed and prosper. The Georgia Economic Mobility Plan will grow the economy for Georgians and focus on earnings, savings, skills, worker protections and inclusion:

- **Earn**: Keep more money in the pocketbooks of working families through a Georgia Earned Income Tax Credit. Protect workers from wage theft to ensure wages earned are wages received. Secure equal pay for women through pay history reforms.

- **Save**: Create a Cradle to Career Savings Program for families. Encourage savings and credit-building through the Georgia FinLit Initiative: A Financial Literacy and Wellness Partnership.

- **Grow**: Bridge the skills gap with a focus on employability skills and adult literacy.

- **Include**: Expand employment opportunities for Georgians with disabilities.

- **Protect**: End workplace discrimination for all Georgians.
Dear Fellow Georgians:

Recently, I was sitting in traffic and heard the wail of sirens. The light changed, and every car stayed put to let the ambulance race through the intersection. In those moments, I felt a sense of pride for those who idled in their cars around me. We each had our own destinations, and we wanted to get there as quickly as possible. Yet, when we hear those sirens, we stop. We wait. We make way for those who need us to carve a path.

Across our state, our fellow Georgians are fighting for survival. They have lost access to hospitals and the jobs they've relied upon for years, and they struggle with low or stagnant wages that never seem to rise. Too many are grappling with hunger, poverty, and addiction. Millennials are inheriting a state where the economy can seem inaccessible, and folks in every county are trapped by lack of opportunity. While some Georgians are moving forward and ahead, too many are blocked and denied mobility. Let’s be clear: this is not just an issue for the working poor. Middle class families also work harder for less and need pathways to greater economic security and wealth.

I am excited about leading Georgia because I know we have the resources, the smarts, and the capacity to make way for more Georgians to thrive. That’s what I’m bringing to the governor’s office—the leadership and experience to do this.

Georgia has a strong economy for some, but not all of us. Our state has lagged in equality and shared success—ranking among the top ten states for poverty rates with families struggling to meet their basic needs.¹ Nationally, 70% of children born at the bottom do not reach middle class in their adulthood.²

As Georgia’s next governor, I will prioritize economic mobility as key to ensuring our state is known as a place for prosperity. Poverty and inequality stand in the way of economic growth for our state through higher social costs, lost earnings, and weakened competitiveness.³

I grew up in a working poor family, and in addition to the immorality of families working hard and barely scraping by, poverty is economically inefficient. Poverty comes at too high a cost—to families, to communities, and to our state as a whole. We need to harness the hard work and ingenuity of all our workers to advance our state. Moreover, we must support our future workforce by helping parents move out of poverty so their children can succeed in school, because we know poverty is the primary out-of-school impediment to learning and school performance.⁴
The Georgia Economic Mobility Plan

(Continued)

Georgians who struggle to get ahead rather than just get by face different challenges. Our campaign has already released bold and innovative platforms on jobs and child care, and we will continue to offer solutions to our toughest challenges in education, small business development, mental health care access, criminal justice, and other policy areas to address the many barriers to success. These initiatives are aimed at meeting Georgians where they are, and envisioning a state where success is not only possible, it is expected.

To ensure all Georgians thrive, we must promote a fair economy that removes barriers to opportunity and fosters prosperity. This platform addresses roadblocks for families facing low and stagnant wages, highest unemployment, and biggest skills gaps. These initiatives promote fairness in earnings and savings, learning opportunities, and employment options:

- **Earn**: Keep more money in the pocketbooks of working families through a Georgia Earned Income Tax Credit. Protect workers from wage theft to ensure wages earned are wages received. Secure equal pay for women through pay history reforms.
- **Save**: Create a Cradle to Career Savings Program for families. Encourage savings and credit-building through the Georgia FinLit Initiative: A Financial Literacy and Wellness Partnership.
- **Grow**: Bridge the skills gap with a focus on employability skills and adult literacy.
- **Include**: Expand employment opportunities for Georgians with disabilities.
- **Protect**: End workplace discrimination for all Georgians.

As I continue traveling the state talking to Georgians about how we can move our state forward, I want to hear from you about The Georgia Economic Mobility Plan. Read the plan at [www.staceyabrams.com/economicmobilityplan](http://www.staceyabrams.com/economicmobilityplan). Tweet @staceyabrams, visit my Facebook page, or email askstacey@staceyabrams.com to share your thoughts or ask questions about the policies that will shape a new Georgia. If we engage the diversity of our state—from millennials to rural entrepreneurs to urban pioneers—then we will have a Georgia that is the envy of the nation.

Sincerely,

[Signature]
THE GEORGIA ECONOMIC MOBILITY PLAN

EARN

► Reward Work through a Georgia Earned Income Tax Credit

Some jobs do not pay enough to make ends meet. Additionally, taxes can set working poor families further behind as our regressive state and local tax systems place heavier burdens on those at the bottom than those at the top. The federal government and a majority of states have met this challenge with an Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), one of the most effective tools for lifting families out of poverty. As the Brookings Institution states, “No other tax or transfer program prevents more children from living a life of poverty…”6 Research has connected the EITC to higher employment for single mothers, lower poverty rates, and better health outcomes.6

An EITC encourages and rewards work by providing a refundable credit that increases with work effort for those with the lowest incomes and gradually declines for moderate-income workers. The credits focus mainly on workers with children who earn less than $54,000 if married or $48,300 if single, varying by number of children.7 States typically piggy-back on the federal EITC so families can more easily apply for the state tax credit.

Our plan will create a refundable Georgia Earned Income Tax Credit to benefit working families. This credit will boost incomes for Georgia families across the state. We will begin with a refundable credit targeted at 5% of the federal EITC and move the state towards the goal of a 10% credit. Cost: $150 million paid for by the elimination of tax loopholes.

► Ensure Wages Earned Are Wages Received

Wage theft means that hardworking Georgians are not receiving the wages they have earned. This injustice comes in several forms (e.g. minimum wage violations, overtime pay violations, misclassification of workers as independent contractors) and pushes already struggling families further down the economic ladder.

The Economic Policy Institute recently estimated that for minimum wage violations alone, Georgia workers are likely underpaid a total of $301 million in annual wages. This translates to an estimated $71 per week for those workers experiencing minimum wage violations in Georgia.8

The far reach of the federal EITC in Georgia:

- An estimated 2.6 million Georgians, including 1.2 million children, were eligible for the federal EITC in 2015.
- About half of eligible filers had a high school degree or less, while the other half had some college or postsecondary degrees.
- About one-quarter million Georgians are lifted out of poverty each year by the federal EITC.
- 80,000 Georgia veterans and military families received the federal EITC in 2012.
- About 40,000 families receiving the EITC are paying student loan debt.
- About 340,000 families receiving the EITC have small business or farming income.
- The federal EITC pumps $3 billion into local economies around the state.

Sources: Brookings Institution & Georgia Budget and Policy Institute
Wage theft slows the climb from survival to success for Georgia’s working families and falls disproportionately on the working poor, immigrants, people of color, and women. It occurs across industries—retail, restaurant, construction, building and personal services, and others—and creates unfair advantages for employers who are bad actors compared to employers who follow the rules.

We plan to protect workers from these abuses by strengthening enforcement, increasing penalties, protecting against retaliation, and providing greater pay stub transparency to workers so they know how their pay was calculated. We will ensure wages earned are wages received.

Stacey Abrams has a track record of leadership on earned income tax credits, minimum wage increases, sick leave and parental leave, and worker misclassification prohibitions. In 2015, Abrams co-sponsored HB 500, a bill that would provide employment security by addressing misclassification issues. In 2017, she attempted to amend legislation to offer similar protections; however, her amendment failed on a party-line vote. In 2017, Abrams fought against HB 243, which preempts local governments from ensuring shift workers have greater stability and reliability in their schedules. In addition to serving as lead attorney on the City of Atlanta’s attempt to create a living wage in the early 2000s, Abrams has introduced and supported legislation to hike the state’s minimum wage.

▶ Secure Equal Pay for Women

Women—particularly women of color—experience a persistent pay gap. Eliminating the pay gap would mean greater financial security and opportunity for families across Georgia. We know this is a priority for working women across industries, occupations, education levels, and communities. It is a priority for Stacey Abrams, too.

As governor, we will fight for equal pay for women. We will create an Equal Pay Task Force to conduct an equal pay audit of state government and pursue legislation barring prospective employers from asking salary history questions. We will speak out for federal efforts to eliminate the wage gap.

Additionally, we will work for supports that help working women get ahead, including sick and family/medical leave, child care and afterschool programs, and training for non-traditional jobs.

Stacey Abrams has been a staunch advocate for closing the pay gap, and as Minority Leader, she ensured that pay equity legislation was included in the Georgia House Democratic Caucus’ legislative agenda. Stacey Abrams has also been a strong supporter of paid sick leave legislation, and has received the Georgia Women for Change Legislator of the Year Award.
SAVE

Encourage Savings and Credit-Building through the Georgia FinLit Initiative: A Financial Literacy and Wellness Partnership

We cannot rely on income alone to advance families to the middle class. Savings break through intergenerational poverty. Low-income children whose parents save are more likely to climb the economic ladder. Savings act as a personal safety net, thereby reducing financial stress and promoting economic mobility.

Some employers are increasingly recognizing the need to prioritize financial wellness and financial literacy similar to employee health wellness programs. Researchers are exploring how financial stress—widespread among workers since the Great Recession—and financial wellness programs affect health, productivity, and absenteeism. Financial wellness programs come in many forms, such as providing financial education or incentivizing savings by matching employee contributions up to a certain level. Georgia’s own SunTrust Bank has become a national leader in this emerging employee benefits arena, reaching thousands of workers to improve credit scores, manage budgets, plan for the future, and create emergency savings.

We are dedicated to advancing the financial security of working families. We will promote financial wellness and financial literacy by fostering public-private partnerships to further these efforts: the Georgia FinLit Initiative. Delaware, for example, has launched a statewide initiative in partnership with United Way, along with Habitat for Humanity, Head Start, Latin American Community Center, Goodwill, other nonprofits, foundations, and employers to spread one-on-one financial coaching across sectors. We will explore models, seek private funding, and develop relationships across industries to engage employers in spurring financial health among Georgians.

Cost: $500,000 to pay for support staff to facilitate programs.

Delaware’s Stand by Me financial wellness program has staff members devoted to the child care sector. The financial coaches help child care workers with their budgeting and financial wellness, while also providing a Sesame Street financial literacy program for parents and children beginning at age 3. These types of programs—in coordination with our Bold Action for a Brighter Future child care plan—can elevate workers and start financial education early.
Create a Cradle to Career Savings Program

We must build a financial pathway for Georgians at an early age to embolden them on a path to success. Research has shown that children’s savings accounts (CSAs) improve attitudes and outcomes. Even small amounts change outcomes. One study found that low to moderate-income children with a small dollar school savings account (i.e. less than $500) were three times more likely to enroll in college and four times more likely to graduate.12

Georgia already supports some—predominantly upper-income—families as they save specifically for college through 529 plans, giving $4,000 tax deductions for college savings. That totals $7 million to $9 million we spend each year in Georgia on families who set aside savings. Families at the low-end of the income scale and those with limited English proficiency are less likely to take advantage of these benefits. We must open up opportunities for working poor families and invest in these children to get their savings started.

Children’s savings account programs can be found at the state or local level in 32 states and DC. CSAs come in a variety of forms, but some important features are long-term asset building, seed money and incentives to grow savings, and limited purposes for the funds.

Our Cradle to Career Savings Program will invest in Georgians from birth so they can make critical steps into adulthood. These funds could be used for first rental payments, college and training, or to launch a first business, for example. The Cradle to Career Savings Program will create an account for children of working poor families at birth and seed an initial investment. We will work with community partners and funders to provide additional savings incentives through matching contributions.
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GROW

Bridge the Skills Gap by Promoting Adult Literacy

We have proposed a child care platform focused on quality early education care starting at birth, but we know one generation isn’t enough. Georgia needs a multi-generational approach focused on the whole family to move families ahead. Low literacy among adults passes down to the next generation, so we must prioritize early childhood education and adult literacy to ensure a high-road economy of the future.

Some 1.2 million working-age Georgians have low literacy skills. That’s 1 in 6 adults who have difficulty understanding basic written instructions. Low literacy skills hold workers back from advancing in the workforce and mean a worker shortage for our employers. This is bad for families and bad for Georgia’s economy. A rigorous longitudinal study on adult education in Oregon found that participants in basic skills programs made average long-term gains of $10,000 in income, with wage increases of 53% compared to average wage losses of 2% for similarly-skilled adults who did not participate in the program.

Promising programs right here in Georgia offer hope for tackling the skills divide. Adult literacy courses are happening in the workplace, family and child care settings, technical colleges, community-based literacy programs, libraries, prisons, and shelters. Georgia business and nonprofit leaders launched the Georgia Literacy Commission in 2017. Georgia was awarded a two-year grant to explore two-generation strategies.

There is momentum, and as Georgia’s next governor Stacey Abrams will lead on adult literacy.

We are committed to expanding literacy opportunities. We will champion adult and family literacy, raise awareness of opportunities and coordinate efforts, speak out against federal funding cuts and leverage public dollars for private funds, enable research into best practices, and partner with educators, technical colleges, employers, funders, nonprofits, and families to spread successful models.

Our technical college system is key to economic mobility. As governor, Stacey Abrams plans to make technical college tuition-free. We will outline our tuition-free plan and expanded technical education solutions in our forthcoming higher education platform.

Abrams serves on the board for the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, and she previously served as a director for the Literacy Action Board of Directors.
Expand Employability Skills Training for Youth and Adults

One of the most important trainings we can provide as a state is training in how to be a good employee. Employability skills—or soft skills—involves being on time, having a good attitude, working well on a team, and communicating effectively. Employability skills can be taught across disciplines and are valued across sectors. Whether you plan to be a welder, mechanical engineer, nurse, or truck driver, soft skills are in demand.

A recent Task Force in Georgia identified the importance of advancing soft skills throughout curriculums from elementary school through post-secondary. Our own Bold Action for a Brighter Future Plan committed us to afterschool robotics programs that promote team-based employability skills alongside technical skills. We will commit more broadly to employability skills for all ages by:

- Joining partners to foster awareness and best practices in soft skills training.
- Helping develop deeper relationships between industry and education to link soft skills needs and curriculums.
- Supporting Georgia’s Career, Technical and Agricultural Education in their leadership of this effort.
INCLUDE

- Enhance Competitive Employment Opportunities for Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

Americans with disabilities have unemployment rates twice as high as those with no disability. They are actively looking for work, but unable to find it. Work provides income, but also means greater stability in housing and social networks and a chance to contribute to the community.

For Georgians with intellectual and developmental disabilities in particular who want to work, we must do a better job of ensuring their passion is met with opportunity.

Part of this challenge stems from our traditional models of service, which relied on segregated facilities rather than community-based and employer-based approaches. Currently, just 1% of spending on individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Georgia goes to supported employment services. We need a governor who will prioritize supported employment, engage partners, and scale current efforts.

For youth who are transitioning from high school, in particular, Georgia needs an Employment First strategy. Similar to adult literacy, Georgia has promising programs to connect youth with customized work that caters to their individual skills and passions. Programs like Project Search connect youth transitioning from high school to jobs and civic activities, providing supported employment through job coaches, integrated classroom and workplace options, and soft skills training. These programs should be available in every high school in every county. We will aid providers in shifting to an employment-centered approach by promoting partnerships with employers and restructuring systems and incentives to enhance competitive employment opportunities. This Employment First strategy will be available for those who want to work, and we recognize and respect the continuation of non-employment services for those who do not seek that path.

In the legislature, Stacey Abrams led the Georgia House Democratic Caucus to champion Medicaid Expansion in Georgia, which would help low-income disabled Georgians afford necessary medical services. As a consultant, her firm advised the Tommy Nobis Center on ways to expand opportunities for full-employment for the disabled.
PROTECT

Ensure All Georgians Are Protected from Employment Discrimination

For families to thrive, we need an economy and a workplace that includes all Georgians. Many states prohibit employers from discriminating based on factors such as race, color, national origin, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, religion, pregnancy, and disability. Georgia does not have an employment-related discrimination law for private employers.¹⁸

We envision a fair and diverse economy for all Georgians—which means full inclusion. We will:

• Advance protections for all workers by championing robust anti-discrimination laws.

• Ensure that protections against harassment within the executive branch are strong, comprehensive, and just.

• Work collaboratively with legislators to define the rules of conduct, construct clear pathways for complaints, require sexual harassment prevention programs and training, and ensure appropriate penalties.

• Reform the Georgia Commission on Equal Opportunity into the Georgia Commission on Human Rights. This restructured commission will have the ability to set clear pathways for harassment complaints, be a referral point for Georgia workers, and oversee mediation or investigations into harassment for those workers who do not fall under federal purview.

Throughout her career, Stacey Abrams consistently opposed discriminatory legislation. She has been a vocal critic of the Religious Freedom and Restoration Act, which would have allowed business owners to discriminate based on their religious beliefs. In 2016, Abrams voted against HB 757,¹⁹ a combined version of the Pastor Protection Act and the First Amendment Defense Act (FADA), which critics warned would allow taxpayer-funded groups to deny services to members of the LGBTQ community.²⁰ She was joined by the ACLU, Georgia Equality, and members of the business community in her opposition. Abrams has also been a strong advocate for protecting and ensuring equal rights for LGBT couples: she endorsed same sex marriage in 2006 and cosponsored HB 323, to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation within state agencies.²³
WHY STACEY ABRAMS?

Stacey Abrams is the daughter of a shipyard worker and librarian—college educated parents who struggled to make ends meet. As a librarian, her mother faced wage discrimination. And while her father was able to memorize his way through school, his undiagnosed dyslexia meant that he did not learn to read until well into adulthood. Abrams understands first hand that discrimination and disability can be barriers to success for hardworking families.

As Minority Leader of the Georgia House of Representatives, Abrams fought to help workers take care of themselves and their families. Abrams received Friend of Labor Award from the Georgia AFL-CIO and has been endorsed by the Georgia AFL-CIO, the Working Families Party, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 613, the Georgia State Building and Construction Trades Council, Atlanta North Georgia Building Trades Council, the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades District Council 77, the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 926, and the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union Southeast Council because of her commitment to creating a Georgia that ensures the rights of working families.

Abrams has put forth a bold effort to support working families through a three-pillar approach: focusing on our educational system from cradle to career; building a fair and diverse economy; and creating a government that engages and serves all Georgians.
ENDNOTES:

1. U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey.
2. Note: Seventy percent of Americans raised in the bottom two income quintiles do not move to the middle income quintile in adulthood. http://www.pewtrusts.org/~/media/assets/2013/11/01/movingonuppdf.pdf
5. https://www.brookings.edu/research/building-on-the-success-of-the-earned-income-tax-credit/
7. For tax year 2016, the maximum income was $39,300 to $53,500 depending on number of children and marital status. Childless workers are eligible for smaller credits and have maximum income level of $14,900 to $20,400 depending on marital status.
9. Ibid.
14. https://proliteracy.org/Portals/0/Reder%20Research.pdf?ver=2017-03-24-151533-647. Note: The study tracked participants over a 10 year period. The $10,000 income gain was associated with an average of 100 hours of instructional hours. The percentage wage gain was not based on number of hours of participation.
17. http://stateofthestates.org/docs/Georgia.pdf
19. Mar/16/2016 – HB 757, House Vote #777
20. “Georgia Senate passes religious freedom bill,” Steve Almasy and Dave Alsup, CNN Politics, 02/20/2016
21. Georgia Equality 2006 Endorsement Questionnaire