



Invest in Our People, Expand Opportunity

Georgia Can Leverage \$4.9 Billion in Federal Dollars to Jumpstart Recovery

Georgia will receive \$4.9 billion in federal emergency relief and infrastructure funding as part of the American Rescue Plan. This money is meant to be used to support Georgians as they recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. Gov. Brian Kemp is overseeing how the state will spend this money. State leaders should use the funds for targeted investments to bolster education outcomes, provide economic assistance to families and increase access to health care and broadband. Smart funding can help address racial inequities in our state and foster recovery and prosperity for all Georgians. Investing in families now will help them for years to come.

Options for Spending the \$4.9 Billion:

Restore Budget Cuts

The state of Georgia maintained \$850 million in budget cuts for Fiscal Year 2022. These cuts have widespread effects. They reduce state spending for schools, public health and safety net programs that help combat poverty. These cuts disproportionately affect people of color and rural families. Georgia was hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic because state leaders prefer low investment in our people instead of revenues to better fund programs and services—but if there is one thing COVID has made clear, it's that Georgia cannot cut its way to prosperity.

Enact an Opportunity Weight

Georgia is 1 of 8 states that do not provide additional money to schools for students living in poverty. Students living in poverty experience more housing instability; lack access to high-quality, out-of-school resources and are more likely to face toxic stress, which all impede success in school. An Opportunity Weight would supply school districts with state funds for students who come from households with low incomes in order to meet their unique needs. This funding can be utilized in many ways that would help these students, such as employing more counselors or nurses or even providing in-school washing machines or hygiene products so that students have more help in meeting their basic needs.

Expand Rural Broadband

Over a million Georgians lack access to high speed internet, particularly in rural areas such as Georgia's Black Belt, the area of the state where slave labor was once concentrated and where many Black Georgians still reside. Lack of internet access makes it more difficult to study, find jobs or even secure housing.

Enact an Earned Income Tax Credit

A Georgia Work Credit (State Earned Income Tax Credit, or EITC) reduces the amount of income taxes owed by low- to middle-income households. It helps workers and their families afford basic necessities like transportation, rent or groceries. EITCs are usually structured as a very well-targeted tax cut, but tax cuts are not allowed under the ARP stipulations. One way to ensure Georgians get this boost is to temporarily model the EITC as a direct payment, similar to the stimulus checks families have received from the federal government.

Protect Health Care Workers

The Biden administration has issued new emergency temporary standards to help protect health care workers from COVID-19. Georgia should use funding to help ensure that these measures are enforced across all employees providing health care services or health care support services. Adequate enforcement also improves racial equity, as 41 percent of Georgia's health care industry workers are Black, and 34 percent are Black women.

Increase Access to Health Care

Lawmakers can use funds to help Georgians access care. Medicaid could cover more mental health and substance use disorder services. Lawmakers could also expand school-based mental health centers and services in our K-12 schools as well as our higher education institutions. Improving access to care is especially important for vulnerable communities, such as families making low incomes, Georgians who were previously incarcerated and families living in Georgia's Black Belt, where health infrastructure is weak due to disinvestment. Georgia should also expand Medicaid to help pay for other health services. The ARP created new financial incentives for Medicaid expansion making it an even better deal for Georgia.

Improve Access to Higher Education

Improving access to higher education would help many Georgians secure fulfilling jobs. Access to college advising and paid opportunities relevant to academic and career interests are limited for many young people whose parents did not go to college, are from low-income families, live in rural areas or are people of color. Challenges meeting basic needs like food, shelter and health care also create barriers to academic success for many students, and access to safety net programs can help support focus on learning. Lawmakers can improve access to higher education by boosting statewide access to college advising, creating a Georgia Work-Study program that subsidizes internships and other work-based learning opportunities for college students and recent graduates and providing more outreach and support to students in accessing safety net programs that would allow them to attend school.

With these federal dollars, Georgia has the to improve the lives of generations to come. The state does not need to rely on short-term investments that expire in a few years—lawmakers can raise revenues with simple measures like setting our tobacco tax to the national average or closing corporate loopholes to help generate the funding to keep these critical investments in Georgia's families permanent.