

How Far Yet to Go?

The Status of Women in Georgia 1970 and Today

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Foreword

“The ability of women to participate equally in the economic and social life of the Nation has been facilitated by their ability to control their reproductive lives.”

Justice Sandra Day O'Connor
US Supreme Court Justice

In her affirmation of reproductive rights in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor wrote, “The ability of women to participate equally in the economic and social life of the Nation has been facilitated by their ability to control their reproductive lives.” All around us, women’s lives have changed as a result of reproductive freedom, autonomy and progressive movements for women’s rights and civil rights.

What is the proper role of government with respect to the life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness for American women? This is a question to which an answer the ACLU has devoted considerable resources. In 1972, the ACLU Women’s Rights Project was founded by attorney Ruth Bader Ginsburg. The Women’s Rights Project works to ensure that women and their families can enjoy the benefits of full equality and participation in every sphere of society. Around the same time, the ACLU of Georgia was supporting attorney Margie Pitts Hames in her challenge to Georgia’s abortion statute. That effort resulted in *Doe v. Bolton*, a companion case to *Roe v. Wade*.

In 1972, the U.S. Congress passed the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). A few years later, ERA Georgia was formed, and my mother, Jean Childs Young, and Atlanta civic leader Sherry Frank worked with a bi-racial coalition of women to promote the Equal Rights Amendment in Georgia. I still have a photo of my mother with Gloria Steinem during that campaign. Ultimately, the Georgia General Assembly rejected the ERA in 1982, and it still has not been ratified to this day.

In early 2019, the bill that became Georgia’s abortion ban law began moving through the General Assembly. Despite the valiant efforts of reproductive rights and justice organizations, allies, and pro-choice members of the state legislature, the legislation passed the House of representatives by two votes, setting the stage for the governor’s signature on May 7, 2019. On June 28, the ACLU and partners filed *SisterSong v. Kemp*, a federal lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of the abortion ban. As of this writing, a preliminary injunction prevents the law from taking effect.

The original plan for this report was to document the progress women in Georgia have made since 1970 and the decision in *Roe v. Wade*. As we looked at the data, we found that women in Georgia had indeed come a long way from their status in 1970. At the same time, indicators of equality and well-being for women in Georgia lagged behind our peers in other developed countries and other U.S. states. This fact stands in the context of Georgia’s ranking as the 9th largest economy among the states.

Andrea Young
Executive Director
ACLU Foundation of Georgia



A survey of available indicators and rankings suggested that Georgia's draconian abortion ban was a symptom of an even larger problem – decision-makers in the state of Georgia are failing Georgia's women by nearly every measure of equality and well-being.

That being the case, we have reframed the report to present an overview of meaningful indicators of women's equality and well-being – in health, education, income and employment, and in political influence. This report was prompted by an assault on reproductive rights. These rights are necessary,

but not sufficient by themselves for women to thrive and enjoy full equality in our society.

As we release this report, the COVID-19 pandemic is revealing greater fissures in our society. Women, and particularly women of color, are disproportionately impacted by the pandemic—more likely to lose their jobs, more likely to work in essential jobs on the frontlines of the pandemic; and more likely to struggle with school closures and the loss of childcare for their children. The pandemic gives this work even more urgency.

Our goal is to initiate a statewide conversation about the status of women in Georgia, assess how far we have to go to reach equality, and to develop strategies for achieving the goal of genuine equality for all women in Georgia.

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Snapshot *Status of Women in Georgia Today*



- According to the latest American Community Survey (ACS) from the U.S. Census, White women comprise 50.6% of Georgia's population, Black women 31%, Latinx women, 8%, Asian women, 3.3%, and all other groups considering themselves non-White, 2.7%.
- In addition to the enjoined abortion ban law, HB 481, Georgia already has a 20-week ban on abortions, requires parental notification for minors to obtain an abortion, mandates a 24-hour waiting period, and does not provide public funding for abortion care for low-income women.¹
- Of the 159 counties in the state, 70 are without OBGYN care.²
- In the nation, Georgia ranks 46th in childcare and young children's education programs. In fact, WalletHub's report ranks Georgia as one of the worst states to raise a family.³
- The maternal mortality rate in the United States is 17.2 per 100,000 births. Georgia has a rate of 40 per 100,000 births. The rate for Black women is 62.1 in the State of Georgia.⁴
- California, New Jersey, Connecticut, Oregon, New York, Massachusetts, Washington, Rhode Island, Maine, Vermont, and Minnesota have their own family- and school-leave provisions; Georgia

¹ Guttmacher Institute. 2020. State Facts About Abortion: Georgia. March. <https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/state-facts-about-abortion-georgia>.

² Kaiser Family Foundation. 2019. "Giving Birth in Georgia Is Too Often a Deadly Event." <https://khn.org/news/giving-birth-in-georgia-is-too-often-a-deadly-event/>.

³ McCann, A. 2020. "Best and Worst States to Raise a Family." WalletHub. <https://wallethub.com/edu/best-states-to-raise-a-family/31065/#main-findings>.

⁴ Petersen, E., N. Davis, D. Goodman, S. Cox, N. Myers, E. Johnston, C. Syverson, et al. 2019. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/index.html>. Yale Global Health Justice Partnership. 2018. When the State Fails: Maternal Mortality and Racial Disparity in Georgia. <https://law.yale.edu/yls-today/news/when-state-fails-maternal-mortality-and-racial-disparity-georgia>.

has none beyond the unpaid federal Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA).⁵

- The percentage of women with health insurance is 83.3, ranking the state at a dismal 48.⁶
- About 41% of employed women in Georgia are in managerial or professional occupations, which tend to require a four-year degree and often have higher wages.⁷
- Georgia women earn less than men, on average. Women in the state who work full time year-round earn an average of \$36,000 per year compared to \$44,000 for men.⁸
- If employed women in Georgia were paid the same as comparable men, their poverty rate would be reduced by nearly half and poverty among employed single mothers would drop by more than two-fifths.⁹
- In 1977 only 4.7% of the state legislature were women; by 2019, 30.5% were women.¹⁰
- The Education Law Center ranked Georgia 37th in its 2018 report evaluating fair school funding of all U.S. states, plummeting from its 22nd position in 2007. Georgia has cut approximately \$9 billion from public schools since 2003.¹¹
- In 2017, Georgia had the fourth highest rise in tuition rates for colleges and universities, with an increase of 73.4%, or a \$3,629 increase in overall tuition costs.¹²



5 National Partnership for Women and Families. 2018. Raising Expectations: A State-by-State Analysis of Laws that Help Working Family Caregivers. <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/economic-justice/raising-expectations.html>.

6 Institute for Women's Policy Research. 2019. "State of Women in the States—Georgia." <https://statusofwomendata.org/explore-the-data/state-data/georgia/>.

7 Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. 2016. Economic Opportunity Agenda for Georgia Women. https://gbpi.org/2016/economic-opportunity-agenda-for-georgia-women/#_edn23.

8 Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. 2016. Economic Opportunity Agenda for Georgia Women. https://gbpi.org/2016/economic-opportunity-agenda-for-georgia-women/#_edn23.

9 Status of Women in the States. 2018. 2018 National Fact Sheet and State Fact Sheets. <https://statusofwomendata.org/publications/state-fact-sheets/>.

10 Center for American Women and Politics. 2020. State Fact Sheet—Georgia. https://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/state_fact_sheets/ga.

11 Owens, S. 2018. "Beyond Basic Education: Five Ways for Georgia to Fund Schools Fairly." Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. <https://gbpi.org/2018/beyond-basic-education-five-ways-for-georgia-to-fund-schools-fairly/>.

12 Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. 2017. Georgia Higher Education Data Book. https://gbpi.org/2019/georgia-higher-education-data-book-2019/#_edn2.

Executive Summary

Introduction



The reproductive justice framework takes a holistic stance on the lives of women to underscore that women require complete control over their reproductive bodies to truly achieve equality.

Reproductive Justice is defined as the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities. It includes not only access to family planning (safe abortion care and contraception), but also to prenatal and postnatal care, work flexibility, and maternity and family leave, as well as access to affordable childcare for all women. All of these issues are vital for advances in women’s education, employment, elected office, and overall health, in other words, for women’s autonomy and liberty. Researchers have shown that in states with adequate reproductive health policies, women are more upwardly mobile.

The reproductive-justice framework takes a holistic stance on the lives of women to underscore that women require complete control over their reproductive bodies to truly achieve equality. It also highlights the racial disparities in women’s healthcare, institutionalized historically by systemic racism.

The strategy of slowly winnowing reproductive rights has given way to blunt-force removal of reproductive control and punitive measures against women. Georgia exemplifies the apex of this change in tactics with the passing of House Bill 481, arguably one of the most restrictive abortion bans in the country. Although a federal judge granted an injunction blocking House Bill 481 temporarily, the fact that such a bill would even be signed into law illustrates the dire place the battle concerning women’s autonomy over their bodies has reached. The ramifications of legislation like House 481 are clear, jeopardizing the ability of women in Georgia to live productive and autonomous lives.

The purpose of this paper is to review and compare the social trends and rights of women in the State of Georgia in 1970 and today across the following dimensions: healthcare, family structure, education, employment, and elected office through a reproductive justice frame.

We first explain why we use this frame as well as describe its central principles. We then examine what it was like for Georgia's women in 1970 and what it is like today, providing the current Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR, 2019) state rankings along these dimensions for Georgia. Lastly, we provide initial policy recommendations.

Developed by women of color, the concept of reproductive justice seeks equality in women's health. One central argument of this framework has been that because reproductive health, rights, and justice intersect with women's autonomy in the labor force, education, family planning, access to adequate healthcare, opportunities to seek elected office, environmental justice, and the right to community safety, policy solutions need to seek further gender and racial equity (Blueprint 2019). According to the latest American Community Survey (ACS) from the U.S. Census, White women comprise 50.6% of Georgia's population, Black women 31%, Latinx women, 8%, Asian women, 3.3%, and all other groups considering themselves non-White, 2.7%. This amounts to 45.6% of non-White women in the state, with almost 68% of minority women identifying as Black. Given this majority among women in the state and to provide saliency to our examination, the reproductive justice framework is most appropriate.



*Photo credit: Deal, Steve, "Supporters and opposition observe as the Georgia Senate votes on ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, Atlanta, Georgia, January 21, 1980," Digital Public Library of America
<http://dp.la/item/d601783a14fd40e52eb82450d1a7ef89>*

The 1970s was a dramatically different time for women in the United States. The conditions of women's health and healthcare, their familial, educational and economic standing, and their stark underrepresentation in elected office created a broader societal structure where women were not valued as individuals, but through their relationships to men and to their children. Barriers to women's rights were also compounded by the fact that they did not control their reproductive choices.

The *Roe v Wade* Supreme Court ruling in 1973 was a major victory for the status of women as autonomous people by providing a constitutional right to abortion, thus control over reproduction. This also meant access to improved family planning, including better access to birth control. Thus, this ruling had major implications for women's economic and educational opportunities and was a foundational time of hope. At the same time, the 1970s was a time of widespread enforcement of school desegregation orders, paving the way for significant educational advancement for Black women and girls.

Racism, Sexism, and Women's Healthcare

Although healthcare was certainly far less expensive in 1970, a body of empirical research emerged documenting various sexist practices in women's healthcare, including reproductive health, that put women at risk (Munch 2006). In addition, Georgia had the highest maternal mortality rate in the nation at 177 per 10,000 births (Rochat, Tyler, and Schoenbucher 1971).

Emerging from such conditions in women's healthcare was the Women's Health Movement, aiming to provide adequate, non-gender-biased healthcare for women. At that time, Planned Parenthood clinics were expanding to provide healthcare for women as well. The Atlanta Feminist Women's Health Center (AFWHC), founded in 1977, grew to become a vital center, providing reproductive care to women in the Southeast, regardless of socioeconomic status or race (Nelson 2015).

Georgia's persistent high maternal mortality rate and unequal access to pre- and postnatal care demonstrate a serious lag today. In addition, racial disparities are stark. Black women in Georgia have a maternal mortality rate 62.1 per 100,000 live birth, compared to 27.1 for White women (GHJP 2018). Maternal mortality relates to several issues. Of the 159 counties in the state, 70 are without OBGYN care (Kaiser Family Foundation 2019b). According to the Kaiser Family Foundation Report (2019b), since 1994, 35 labor and delivery units have closed, mainly in rural hospitals, and such closures have accelerated in recent years as the state government is unwilling to use the Affordable Care Act to expand Medicaid.

Though Black women in the state are at much higher risk for maternal mortality, the rate for White women here is twice as high as the national average and higher than many other developed countries (Kaiser Family Foundation 2019b).

Georgia is the 5th most impoverished state in the United States with 18% of its population living below the federal poverty line (Kaiser Family Foundation 2017). Racial disparities affect the composition of those in poverty, with 31% of Black people, 27% of Hispanics, and 9% of White people living below the poverty line (Kaiser Family Foundation 2017). GHJP (2018) states: while social factors play an important role, they do not account entirely for the inequities in health status and outcomes

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between Black and White women [in Georgia]. As others have noted, past and present social and economic deprivation, lifelong exposure to racism, institutionalized discrimination, and contemporary policy decisions must also be taken into consideration when analyzing health risks. (p. 19)

Georgia joined 13 other states in not accepting the expansion of Medicaid mandated by the Affordable Care Act (ACA). The decision not to expand Medicaid coverage was estimated to affect the lives of 682,000 residents (Families USA 2018). At the same time, the provisions of the ACA concerning prescription drugs included birth control, expanding contraception access for women with insurance.

Georgia has poor rankings for women's health (IWPR): the state ranks 36th for rates of heart-disease mortality (per 100,000), 45th for diabetes (population percent), and 50th for AIDS (per 100,000).

The percentage of women with health insurance is 83.3, ranking the state at a dismal 48. Latina women have the lowest percentage of health insurance (53.8). The state ranks 40th in household income.

In terms of reproductive health, Black women in the state have the highest percentage (per 100,000) of infant mortality (9.7) and low birthweight (13.4). In addition to the enjoined abortion ban law, Georgia already has a 20-week ban on abortions, requires parental notification for minors to obtain an abortion, mandates a 24-hour waiting period, and does not provide public funding for abortion care for low-income women.

Dramatic Changes in Family Life

Women of the 1970s were more likely to have children younger, more likely to be married, and much less likely to work outside the home (Moen 1991; Pew Research Center 2015). The average age of women having a child was 21 (Bui and Miller 2018). Of the almost 80 percent of all women who were married, 9.4% were head of a household, and 54.5% had a child in the home (Blau 1998). In 1978, only 10% of women reported their job and family life interfered with each other (Pew Research Center 2015).

Family living arrangements have changed dramatically since the 1970s. Most adults raising children are workers. Women are working similar hours to their male counterparts, but, on average, are paid less while being responsible for far more childcare and broader familial caregiving responsibilities (Parker 2015).

At the same time, women clearly have more choices about planning a family. According to the Census Bureau, in Georgia, the average age of women having children went from 21 to 26 years of age. Older motherhood has made it possible for women to gain more advanced education and employment opportunities. Here are some national trends that also apply to Georgia.

- Sixty-six percent of households are family households, down from 81% in 1970.
- Between 1970 and 2012, the share of households comprising married couples with children under 18 halved from 40% to 20%.

ARC (2015) also analyzed the changing family structure in Georgia

and found that almost 34% of families with children are now headed by a single parent in the 10-county Atlanta region – more than doubling since 1970.

Despite these family-structure trends and income disparities, political officials have severely cut governmental support for familial caregiving activities. The ability for women to make autonomous decisions about their children and the ability to care for them is a central tenet of Reproductive Justice. However, state policies fail to provide the resources or services necessary to support the women of Georgia as caregivers, particularly those with lower incomes.

The IWPR current rankings on work and family highlight both Georgia’s shortcomings and advances. The gender gap in labor-force participation for parents with children under six years of age is 25.7%, ranking the state 24th. The percentage of four-year olds enrolled in state Pre-K, preschool special education, and State and Federal Head Start is 65.9%, ranking the state at 8th place. The state has no paid family leave law, and unemployment insurance does not cover family care reasons.

Gender, Racial, Ethnic Pay Gap Barely Improved After Half Century of Progress

In 1970, women represented close to 40% of Georgia’s workforce, with 45% of married Georgia women working outside the home (GBPI 2018). Black women were more likely to work outside the home (Mandel and Semyonov 2014). The gross gender wage gap was 65.7%, and many occupations were largely segregated by gender (Roos and Reskin 1992). Black women without college degrees were often relegated to low-wage domestic work, an occupation excluded from the 1935 Social Security Act as it did not meet the definition of “regularly employed in commerce and industry” (Dewitt 2010).

In 1968, Dorothy Bolden, an Atlanta-based domestic worker, co-founded the National Domestic Workers Union of America (NDWUA). Bolden began organizing “maids,” using public bus-transfer hubs such as Five Points, which provided transit to the all-White northern part of the city where their jobs were located (Nadasen 2015). Ultimately, the NDWUA led to improved wages (Nadasen 2015). Domestic workers also became entitled to Social Security benefits with the employer required



Today, Black women have the highest labor force participation rate, at 63.6% in Georgia, and over a third own their own business.

More Latina women live below the federal poverty line (almost 25%) than any other group, with Black women following close behind at 23%.

to pay in.

A Status of Women in the States (2018) Factsheet indicates that today, Black women have the highest labor force participation rate, at 63.6% in Georgia, and over a third own their own business. A growing share of employed women in Georgia are in managerial or professional occupations. About 41% of women hold these positions, which tend to require a four-year degree and often have higher wages. Almost 41% of businesses in the state are owned by women, ranking it second in the Nation. Thus, Georgia women have become a more significant part of its workforce, growing from 40% of workers in 1970 to nearly 48% in 2015 (GBPI 2016). Fifty-nine percent of married women work outside the home. Participation in the workforce for Georgia single mothers is 83%. In nearly 52% of all Georgia families with children, women are now breadwinners who are either the sole providers or earn at least 40% of family earnings (GBPI 2019). This share puts Georgia slightly above the national average. Therefore, earnings for Georgia women are increasingly crucial to the vitality of Georgia families and the state's economy.

Yet, despite this progress, Georgia women earn less than men, on average. Women in the state who work full time year-round earn an average of \$36,000 per year compared to \$44,000 for men. Median earnings for Georgia women working full time, year-round were only 70% of the average earnings for White men in the state (GBPI 2016). If employed women in Georgia were paid the same as comparable men, their poverty rate would be reduced by nearly half and poverty among employed single mothers would drop by more than two-fifths (Status of Women in the States 2018).

Georgia is ranked 26th for the percentage of women with a bachelor's degree or higher (31.5%). (IWPR) However, this varies by ethnicity and race. Asian women are more likely than any other group to have a bachelor's degree or higher (50.2%), followed by White women (33.1%), Black women (25.1%), and Latina women (18.1%).



More Latina women live below the federal poverty line (almost 25%) than any other group, with Black women following close behind at 23%. Households headed by single mothers with children living at home are far more likely to be living below the federal poverty line than any other group (42.6%). This ranks the state 33rd. (IWPR)

Race, Ethnicity Impact Women's Educational Gains

Nationally, 66% of women received a high school diploma or a GED, and 11% held bachelor's degrees in 1970 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2017). Whereas Georgia mirrored these statistics in 1970, this was also a time when higher education and K-12 were going through federally mandated desegregation. Although desegregation was based on the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court case, *Brown v. Board of Education*, which declared "separate but equal" unconstitutional, southern states including Georgia were slow to comply and it took decades for the system to become fully desegregated.

In Georgia and other southern states, young women and girls were pioneers in schools and postsecondary education (Devlin 2018). According to Devlin, many of the very early desegregation lawsuits were filed on behalf of girls or women.

Access to education has fundamentally changed the lives of women since the 1970s. Today, only 6% of women in the United States have not received a high school diploma or a GED compared to 34% in 1970 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2017). When considering higher education, 42% of women hold bachelor's degrees but racial disparities persist. Although 36.2% of non-Hispanic Whites hold bachelor's degrees, only 22.5% of Black people and 15.5% of Hispanics hold bachelor's degrees in the United States.

Consistent with national trends, in Georgia, more women than men graduate from college today. Postsecondary attainment rates are highest in metro Atlanta counties and lowest in rural areas.

According to GBPI (2019), geographic differences in post-secondary education attainment are compounded by large racial and ethnic disparities. Black and Latina women are less likely to receive an associate's or higher degree than White and Asian women.

Overall, spending on the state's public colleges and universities has also faced austerity cuts from Georgia lawmakers. Since the 2008 recession, Georgia has cut state funding for its colleges and universities by 12.4%, or about \$1,399 per student (Center on Budget



Despite Georgia's GDP being 9th largest in the country, Georgia has cut approximately \$9 billion from public schools since 2003 (Owens 2018).



The Education Law Center ranked Georgia 37th in its 2018 report evaluating fair school funding of all U.S. states, plummeting from its 22nd position in 2007 (2018).

and Policy Priorities 2017). In 2017, Georgia had the fourth highest rise in tuition rates. (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities 2017). The share of overall average tuition and fees for the state's public four-year university on household income rose to 15% overall. However, for Black and Latinx households, tuition and fees rose 19.7% and 18.2%, respectively (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities 2017).

Despite Georgia's GDP being 9th largest in the country, funding for K-12 in the state is a major concern. Georgia has cut approximately \$9 billion from public schools since 2003 (Owens 2018). Inadequate funding means these under-resourced schools increase classroom sizes, eliminate advanced-placement or art electives, and lay off teachers to make ends meet (Rothstein 2004; Orfield and Lee 2005). The Education Law Center ranked Georgia 37th in its 2018 report evaluating fair school funding of all U.S. states, plummeting from its 22nd position in 2007 (2018).

Violence Against Women

In 1964, Time Magazine published an article titled, "Psychiatry: The Wife Beater and His Wife." The report described a study conducted by three psychiatrists in Massachusetts examining a small sample (N=137) of the beater and the beaten. They found that beaters tended to fall into the category of hard-working, respectable "mother's" boys and the beaten seemed to fit the pattern of aggressive, efficient, masculine, and sexually frigid. Prior to the resurgence of the women's movement in the 1970s, this was an acceptable characterization of violence against

women. Domestic violence and human trafficking have a long history in Georgia and other previously slave-owning and Jim Crow states, particularly against Black women (Hobson 2019).

According to the Georgia Commission on Family Violence (2018), Georgia is currently ranked 25th in the nation for its rate of men killing women.

Georgia is also a center for human trafficking. According to Covenant House Georgia (2019), Atlanta was named by the FBI as one of 14 U.S. cities with the highest rate of children used in prostitution and approximately 100 adolescent females are sexually exploited each night in Georgia.

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Women in Elected Office

Far more women hold elected office in Georgia today than did in 1970. Yet, whereas Stacey Abrams came very close, Georgia has never had a female governor. In general, women are more likely to be found in Georgia state or local office than in Congress.

As of 2019, 15 of the 56 seats in the state senate were filled by women, and 57 of the 180 in the house were filled by women with the total being 72 of 236 state seats. Georgia is ranked as the 22nd state in female representation. More women in Georgia serve in the state legislature than any other state in the south. The Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University tracks trends concerning women in state legislatures. In 1977 only 4.7% of the state legislatures were women; by 2019, 30.5% were women (Center for American Women and Politics 2020).

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Conclusion and Initial Recommendations

The status of women in Georgia is embedded in a complex scaffolding, with progress and lags, opportunities and disparities. While the status of women in Georgia has certainly advanced since 1970, Georgia pales in comparison to many states in other regions of the country. Some of this lag can be attributed to the South's history of regressive and segregationist social policies. Yet, a paradox emerges between opportunity and these disparities. Women—and particularly Black women—are driving business ownership in the state; the educational attainment of women exceeds their male counterparts, workforce participation has risen—yet, equality remains a distant goal. As a 2016 report concerning the status of women in the South from the IWPR states,

The southern United States is a dynamic and influential region marked by innovation and economic opportunities for women, yet also a region where inequalities persist and many women—especially women of color and those who are immigrants—face challenges such as high unemployment, a large gender wage gap, abuse of their reproductive rights, and low levels of political representation. (IWPR 2016 p. 1)

Women in Georgia are far from the promise of full equality or even reaping the rewards of increased participation in the workplace, political participation and educational attainment. The following are initial recommendations to improve the status of women in Georgia:

1. The Georgia Legislature should ratify the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the U.S. Constitution
 - The ERA would provide, for the first time, explicit constitutional recognition of the fundamental notion of gender equality.
2. Repeal Georgia's HB 481 and other restrictions on access to abortion care.
 - The reproductive rights of Georgia's women should be affirmed by the legislature and not rely on the courts for protection.
3. Fully implement the Affordable Care Act with full funding of Medicaid Expansion.
 - Women are the majority of those on Medicaid. Family planning services, maternal health, pre- and post-natal care would be available to hundreds of thousands more women in Georgia.
4. Mandate Paid Family Medical Leave.
 - Paid leave enables workers to take time off to address serious health and caregiving concerns without risking their lives and livelihoods.
5. Produce an Annual Report on the Status of Women in Georgia
 - A comprehensive report would shine a light on the status of women in Georgia and provide a common frame of reference for evidence-based policy making to improve women's equality.

