



### **The Inequality of Opportunity**

By: Chris Clark, Georgia Chamber President & CEO

We are in an important national conversation on systemic racism and the underlying inequality of economic opportunity in America. The Georgia Chamber and the business community will directly engage in dialogue and actively advocate for policies that create long term job growth, mobility, and equality for all Georgians. Doing so is essential for our collective prosperity.

By 2030, over 20% of Georgia's population will be retired, leaving thousands of jobs and companies in need of talent while placing a challenging strain on our healthcare systems, social services, and the economy. Georgia will become a minority-majority state and must embrace a new understanding of intentional inclusion that celebrates diversity, addresses faults, and creates open and honest discussions.

A recent study by the National Bureau of Economic Research looked at the COVID-19 impact to U.S. small business operators and found that 22% were forced to temporarily or permanently close. The results illuminated the racial disparity of that economic impact. While only 17% of white business owners closed, 41% of black owners were forced to shut down their operations. This trend reached additional minority groups, too, with 32% Hispanic, 26% Asian, and 25% female-owned businesses closing.

Our state proudly leads the country with 20% minority-owned small businesses that employ over 275,000 Georgians. Despite that promising data, many minority entrepreneurs still struggle with access to capital, support infrastructure, and supplier contracts. The average minority-owned small business is 30% smaller and has 47% lower receipts. The disparity in business creation is echoed in today's unemployment figures where Black Americans are experiencing a 16.8% unemployment rate compared to the general population at 13.3%. To make matters worse, over the next 10 years the United States will lose 39 million jobs to robotics and artificial intelligence. Those losses will disproportionately impact minority and rural workers.

Preparing future talent will require a commitment to correcting the racial disparities that exist today. There is no one-stop solution to this issue but consider these statistics. Of Georgia high-schoolers who took the SAT last year, 70% were white and only 44% black. In rural areas, only 41% - combined - had access to take the SAT. And, provided they even obtain this basic education, black workers are 32% more likely to earn low wages than their white equivalent. So, where do we go from here?

First, we must look to build a better-opportunity ecosystem that supplies programming, education, and direction for all Georgians. Local chambers must adjust leadership programs to address systemic racial inequality and be intentionally inclusive. Communities should invest in financial infrastructure, create local innovation loan pools that are publicly and privately funded.

Next, companies should be intentionally inclusive in every single aspect of employee and customer engagement. According to TopCHRO, companies that build diverse teams are two times more likely to reach financial targets. Multi-generational teams that are purposefully inclusive perform at higher levels and are six times more likely to innovate. Businesses should also foster talent development strategies accessible to all employees.

Finally, yet most ardently, we must enact legislation that directly addresses the racial inequality facing Black Americans in our society. As one of 5 states yet to address hate crimes within our laws, we must demand change. [PassHateCrimesGa.com](http://PassHateCrimesGa.com) shares how the business community is advocating for that change and making recommendations during this legislative session.

All of these steps start by listening, engaging, and discussing disparities openly and without blame or judgment. To that end, the Georgia Chamber and the Atlanta Black Chambers will join together for a [National Day of Dialogue on June 25 at 2:00PM](#). We invite local chambers, partners, and businesses to join us for this event and further it by having your own local community dialogue.

In just 30 years, over 15-million diverse citizens will call Georgia home and during that time we have the unique opportunity to use the collective power of the business community and grow into a more equal and just society. With the support of The Atlanta Black Chambers, The Atlanta Business League, The Georgia Minority Supplier Development Council and The Georgia Greater Black Chamber of Commerce, we can create paths for greater economic mobility, help generations move into true economic growth, build a world class core of talent, fill jobs, and form new companies that innovate and inspire. Then, and only then, will we achieve an economy that truly epitomizes the *equality* of opportunity for all.