An Ongoing Demand for Los Angeles: A Bright Future Requires Organizing More Black Public Sector Union Workers
Executive Summary

Introduction

Los Angeles is celebrated for its diversity. It is known today as the cultural, political, and economic center of Southern California. Black workers, in particular, have a deep and important history in Los Angeles. From the City’s founding onward, Black workers have been integral to the cultural and economic structure of the region and have helped to create the rich social fabric that Los Angeles has shared. But the diversity and dynamism Los Angeles are known for are under siege.

For LA’s Black community, which had a 2017 poverty rate of 20.4 percent,¹ public sector unionized employment has long been an avenue to join the middle class. In the face of new federal threats to union employment—such as the Janus v. American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) decision—it is more important than ever to understand how public sector employment impacts Black workers. This study confirms that Black workers and Black middle-class communities would disproportionately be affected by actions against both unions and the stable, well-paying jobs that they have been able to create in public sector employment.
A Diverse Yet Inequitable City

While Los Angeles is one of most diverse cities in the nation, it has struggled with racial inequality since its inception. As in the rest of the country, the legacy of slavery and systemic economic discrimination continues strongly into present-day Los Angeles. This discrimination permeates all layers of Black life and adds to the ongoing generational instability of Black communities, as evidenced by racial disparities in educational opportunities, employment, housing, and life expectancy.² The Black population experiences the highest rates of unemployment and underemployment, homelessness, and incarceration, and has the second lowest life expectancy compared to other ethnic groups in the county.³ It is impossible for all residents of Los Angeles to thrive with such glaring inequities. All communities in Los Angeles are done a disservice when racial inequalities persist.

Unions are Integral to Strong Black Communities

Despite the stark disparities faced by Black Angelenos, two factors continue to contribute the economic and social stability of the Black middle class in Los Angeles: public sector jobs and the unions that represent public sector employees. The Los Angeles Black Worker Center surveyed 730 Black workers who provided the following key findings:
LA County Black public sector union workers have higher earnings than Black private sector workers and are more likely to earn incomes in every higher income bracket (see Figure 1 below).

LA County Black public sector union workers have held their jobs much longer than Black private sector workers: 44 percent of Black public sector union workers had been in their jobs for more than 15 years.

LA County Black public sector union employment helped workers buy houses or stay in desired housing. More than 50 Black workers surveyed said that work helped them stay in a home (e.g., “keep the roof over my head,” “purchase a home,” or “pay the bills”—the largest of which is housing). We can infer that union work protects against forces such as gentrification and displacement, or at least increases housing choices in the face of them.

**Figure 1.** Black Public Sector Union and Non-Union Worker Incomes
Resilient Communities

Black public sector union workers have found stability and opportunity through their jobs and through participation in their unions.

Collee Fields, a Training and Services Coordinator for the City of Compton, shared how her job has helped her support her family.

“I’ve been active in my union for 15 years. My mom was a steward, my grandfather was in his union when he worked at the MTA. I grew up with the union. It’s been a blessing to have this job. It’s important for the Black community to have greater access public sector jobs like mine.”

Tiffany Hall, a 911 Dispatcher for LAPD Communications, has been able to become debt free and support her family as a sole provider because of her public sector job and involvement in her union.

“For me, my job helps me take care of my family of four without struggling. I’ve been working since I was 15, but I didn’t have any job that helped me take care of myself like this job. This is my first union job.”
The Black Middle Class

In LA County, the Black middle class is linked with union work. Public sector union jobs create economic advancement for Black workers who are acting as sole providers and leaders in their communities. Our mapping of public sector union employment and Black middle-class communities shows clear overlap between the two (see Map 1).

Data show that Black workers are more likely to join unions than other racial/ethnic groups. The Institute of Research on Labor Employment found Black unionization rates in the Los Angeles metro area (including Orange County) to be one and a half times White unionization rates, double Asians rates, and triple Latino rates.\(^4\)

Two-thirds of Black workers reported being the sole providers for their families. This is consistent with a study finding that 70.7 percent of Black mothers were sole providers for their families, a far higher rate than for Latina and White mothers.\(^5\)
Black public sector union workers are active in their communities. Two-thirds of workers reported being active in their communities through church, their unions, and other social organizations. Nearly half of them were active very often.

Expanding Opportunities for Los Angeles

Public sector union jobs promote economic opportunity and stability for Angelenos, which provide:

- stability for the Black community in Los Angeles by providing the means to longer careers, quality health care, secure retirement, and housing in the wake of threats such as gentrification and displacement; and
- higher wages, better benefits, and more job stability.
Taking Action Toward an Equitable Future (Recommendations)

Los Angeles-based unions, the government as employers of public sector workers, and policymakers have an opportunity and obligation to create equitable economic advancement for Black Angelenos. The following are recommendations that can be taken to support Black opportunity and LA’s future.

For unions and community:

- partner with Black workers and their communities to expand access, recruitment, and mentoring of Black workers into public sector jobs;

- involve Black public sector members and their families and communities in efforts to strengthen the union and collective bargaining;

- engage union membership to discuss racial discrimination in the workplace by partnering with Black community policymakers and organizations, as an effort to increase union membership and access to work; and

- build cross-class solidarity between the Black working class and the Black public sector union movement to move policies that offer solutions to the Black job crisis and support all Angelenos.
For government:

• implement policies that demonstrate a long-term commitment to a diverse workforce and ensure equitable access for and recruitment from Black communities for public sector jobs;

• recognize that negotiations with public sector unions impact not only workers but also their families and communities;

• provide accurate employee lists and timely notification of new employee orientations to public sector unions, in compliance with AB 119; and

• highlight and celebrate public servants and the important benefits they bring to our communities.

For policymakers:

• stop or reverse privatization, contracting out, and cuts to vital public services, given their economic impact on communities of color in Los Angeles;

• maintain and protect public employee pensions and retirement plans that provide much-needed economic stability in Black communities in LA; and

• pass policies that combat workplace discrimination and help create pipelines for Black workers through mechanisms such as targeted hire.

LA has an obligation to protect its diverse communities and to provide equal opportunities for social, political, and economic advancement. Fostering strong public employee unions is a step toward meeting that obligation.
Introduction

Why Is This Work Important Now?

Black workers have a deep and important history in Los Angeles. Although the first Africans (or Blacks) in Los Angeles can be traced to as early as the 1700s, the Black population in Los Angeles did not become significant until the “Second Great Migration” where it swelled from 63,744 in 1940 to nearly 763,000 in 1970. Black families migrating from southern cities like Houston, New Orleans, and Shreveport sought to escape racial violence and take advantage of growing economic opportunity out west. Many sought work in highly-unionized manufacturing industries.

Beginning in the mid-1960s, however, considerable losses in the number of manufacturing jobs, as well as efforts to weaken unions, contributed to a substantial decline in the number of Black workers in the County, while those who remained have been forced to accept lower wages and face higher barriers to employment—including discrimination by race.

As a result, many Black workers have relied on public sector union work to provide opportunities that have traditionally been more available to White workers. Studies show that Blacks view unions most favorably and Black
“I’ve been at my job for 24 years. I’ve worked at San Pedro, Long Beach, Torrance. I’ve been involved in the union for 20 years. I got involved by a steward... She noticed how much authority and knowledge I had... She helped me understand that I wasn’t getting my pay increases, a merited salary increase. She made my employer give me an evaluation and I got back pay. She cared enough to make sure I got my increases. I stay involved in the union because I’m motivated by job security and looking out for other people. Job security for 24 years is unheard of. They don’t give you raises unless you make them. I see power in having a union. Today, it’s word of mouth that helps people get these jobs. There’s no advertisement about these jobs. People don’t have the same access as before. You have to know someone. You need help to complete the application. They don’t make it easy. In my generation, we were groomed. We had classes that prepared us for work, we learned how to type, how to write letters. People today don’t know how to write a check. When I started, I just had to take a test and I was a good test taker. I applied in Bakersfield where I was living but all the positions were full. I expanded my availability to LA County and I got the job. I moved to LA, but it was cheaper back then. I could afford my rent and I was able to move from there, single with two kids. Today I couldn’t do that.”
Workers are the most likely racial/ethnic group to be represented by unions. An Institute for Research on Labor and Employment (IRLE) study found Black unionization rates in the Los Angeles metro area (including Orange County) were one and a half times the union rate of for Whites, double that for Asians, and three times that of Latinos (see Figure 2).

Black women and women of color in particular both enjoy and are successful in the labor movement. The National Survey of Black Women in Labor found that 95 percent of union-affiliated Black women surveyed would recommend union membership to a friend or family member. Women of color organize and successfully win union representation at higher rates than any other demographic group.

With respect to higher wages, the IRLE found that Los Angeles metro area union workers earned more than their non-union counterparts. The wage gap in Los Angeles was highest with union workers earning 27 percent higher wages (see Table 1). The reverse is
also true: as union work decreases, middle class income shrinks.\textsuperscript{19}

Public sector union jobs have offered economic security and access to the middle class for Black workers and their families. Union work provides benefits and protections for workers, greater diversity in the workplace, a stronger voice in policy debates, higher wages, and improved health and safety practices in the workplace.\textsuperscript{20} These benefits lead to longer, more stable employment and access to healthcare and retirement plans, allowing workers to build wealth and protect against future income losses.\textsuperscript{21}

Today, new and aggressive attempts to diminish unions have emerged. In the US Supreme Court’s \textit{Janus v. AFSCME} decision in June of 2018, the conservative-leaning court decided 5-4 that workers covered under collective bargaining agreements cannot be required to pay unions for the collective bargaining representation provided.\textsuperscript{22} This decision diminishes the power of unions to bargain collectively for all represented workers. Post \textit{Janus}, unions and their members are obligated to represent and bargain for non-dues-paying workers who continue to benefit from unions. Essentially, the decision forces public sector union members to spend their dues to

\begin{table}
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|c|}
\hline
 & Union & Non-union \\
\hline
LA Metro Area & $28.00 & $22.00 \\
\hline
California & $28.30 & $23.60 \\
\hline
U.S. & $26.00 & $21.80 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Average hourly salary of union workers and non-union workers}
\end{table}

represent non-dues-paying members. Unions ultimately rely on dues as well as an active and engaged membership for sustainability and bargaining power. The decision from the courts is not a new effort to curtail collective worker power. The charge to dismantle unions began in the 1940s with segregationists and business leaders who opposed integration and the economic power that Black workers built through unions.23 This ruling is a version of calculated and targeted attacks that have manifested themselves in 27 states over the past few decades. Jobs with smaller wages and fewer benefits are more common in states where these attacks have been successful.24

In the face of these new challenges to union employment and the potential impact on the economic stability of the Black middle class, this report seeks to understand the relationship between union employment and the Black middle class in Los Angeles.
Methodology

To better understand where Black public sector union workers work, live, and interact with their communities, we look at three types of data: (1) survey responses of Black workers; (2) self-reported data on where Black union workers live; and (3) demographic data on LA County’s Black communities.

DATA SOURCES

Survey Responses of Black Workers

In the fall of 2018, the Los Angeles Black Worker Center surveyed Black workers to develop a clearer portrait of their work and community lives. Respondents were contacted in one of three ways. They were recruited by visiting work sites and offered free lunch for their time, visited at home through a canvassing program that focused on historically Black neighborhoods, or contacted by phone. Workers at work sites and at home completed written surveys for future analysis while workers contacted by phone had their responses entered into a digital survey by the canvassers who made the calls. A limitation of the analysis is that it is possible some responses vary based on survey mode (interviewed at work site, home, or via phone) or lack of incentive (only work site participants received free lunch).

The survey consisted of 24 questions related to employment, household composition, wages and compensation, and community involvement. Of the 730 Black workers who took the survey, 549 worked in the public sector, compared to 181 who did not. Six unions participated in the survey: AFSCME 741, AFSCME 2325, AFSCME 3090, AFSCME 3947, SEIU 721, and SEIU 1000.

Four of those surveyed also agreed to give in-depth interviews sharing their stories of public sector union work and
its impacts on their lives. These stories give a voice to the workers described in the data and hopefully make it easier for the reader to know what it’s like to be in their shoes.

**Location Information of Black Workers**

The LA County Federation of Labor (LA Fed) worked with five public sector unions to gather geographic information of its workers: AFSCME 741, AFSCME 2325, AFSCME 3090, AFSCME 3947, and SEIU 721. Although this is a small number of public sector unions, SEIU 721 is by far the largest in LA County, so this analysis paints a fair picture of public sector union workers. It must be noted however, that this analysis might be biased toward public sector unions or workers that collect and share data. For all public sector unions, the ZIP code of residence is used. To protect individual privacy, no individual addresses are used.

**Community Demographics**

Community-level data used in this report are household income by race/ethnicity from 2016 and 2017 American Community Survey (ACS) estimates. Household income
is chosen over family or individual income to understand the impacts of public sector union work on the well-being of everyone in the household. Calculations of these data are made at ZIP Code Tabulation Area (ZCTA) and county geographies. A limitation of using ZCTAs is that they are not ZIP codes, but US Census Bureau approximations of ZIP codes. Analyses of ZCTAs and ZIP codes together rely on visualization and aggregation to minimize the impact of these boundary differences.

**Defining Middle Class, Black Middle Class**

Researchers use many definitions of middle class, including definitions based on a combination of factors, including economic resources, education and occupation status, attitudes, self-perception, and mindset. To understand the relationship between public sector union work and income, middle class is defined here solely by economic resources. Survey data available from Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) databases are generally required to operationalize these definitions for analysis because they can combine household income, education, race/ethnicity, and size variables. Unfortunately, IPUMS data are only available for geographies of 100,000 people or more and are prominently used in metro-area, county, and state analyses. This report looks at ZIP code employment data within LA County, so it adapts a middle-class definition using ACS data.

Middle class is defined here based on a household’s income relative to other incomes in the County. Specifically, in this analysis, middle-class households earn between $50,000 to $100,000 per year. These households represent 28.1 percent or just under one-third of county households (see Table 2). Although the Black median household income is lower than the overall county median household income, Black middle-class households are also defined as earning between $50,000 and $100,000 per year here.

As a result, our definition of middle class is narrower than definitions employed elsewhere. But ensures up-
per- and lower-class households are separate and reflects a reality that middle-income employment is less available than it once was. Additionally, many union jobs aim to start at $50,000 per year, so $50,000 represents an adequate floor. This income-based definition means that one can join the middle class through good employment and not have to move out of one’s neighborhood and into a middle-class neighborhood to join it.

### Table 2. LA County Household Income Distribution 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household Income</th>
<th>Households</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than $10,000</td>
<td>212,577</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10,000 to $14,999</td>
<td>185,054</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$15,000 to $19,999</td>
<td>165,741</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$20,000 to $24,999</td>
<td>169,262</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$25,000 to $29,999</td>
<td>150,477</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$30,000 to $34,999</td>
<td>155,128</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$35,000 to $39,999</td>
<td>140,733</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$40,000 to $44,999</td>
<td>142,741</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$45,000 to $49,999</td>
<td>123,117</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000 to $59,999</td>
<td>234,976</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$60,000 to $74,999</td>
<td>305,209</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$75,000 to $99,999</td>
<td>382,147</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,000 to $124,999</td>
<td>277,765</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$125,000 to $149,999</td>
<td>180,683</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$150,000 to $199,999</td>
<td>205,799</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$200,000 or more</td>
<td>250,436</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>3,281,845</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ACS 2016 five-year estimates table b19001

Note: the LA County median household income was $57,952 +/- $331 in 2016, according to ACS five-year estimates. Black median household income was $41,663 (+/- $520) or more than $16,000 less.
Relationship Between Black Middle Class and Public Sector Union Work

To examine whether changes in public sector union employment might affect Black middle-class communities, we focus on the relationship between the Black middle class in Los Angeles and public sector union work. We do this in three ways: (1) through an analysis of survey responses from Black workers; (2) by calculating public sector unionization rates for workers supplying racial/ethnic information; and (3) by mapping and tabulating Black middle-class neighborhoods, public sector union workers (of all races), and the overlap. The tabulation relies on grouping Los Angeles ZCTAs into five equal-sized groups by their low-to-high percentages of Black middle-class households. The number and rate of public sector union workers living in those same areas are then calculated for each group.
ANALYSIS

Black Middle Class

The ACS estimated that 823,121 Blacks lived in LA County in 2017, representing 8.1 percent of the county’s population (see Table 3). They lived in 314,596 households, whose incomes are detailed below. An estimated 363,728 Blacks were workers at the time of the survey, with a slightly lower workforce participation rate and a slightly higher unemployment rate than county workers overall. These unemployment and labor force participation rates do not account for underemployment, which one study finds affects Blacks at rates twice that of the overall population.28

Within LA County, Black households are more numerous in South LA, including the cities of Inglewood, Hawthorne, Gardena, Lawndale, Carson, Compton, Bellflower, Long Beach, and in the Antelope Valley, including the cities of Lancaster and Palmdale (see Map 2).

The percentage of Black middle class used here is the percentage of Black middle-class households among all households. Black middle-class households, when taken as a percentage of all households, are in similar areas as all Black households.
Public Sector Union Workers

The LA Fed is the Federation (or umbrella organization) for unions in Los Angeles County, representing more than 300 unions and 800,000 workers (see Table 4). It empowers workers to organize to ensure good, safe jobs. This analysis surveyed or worked with data from five of these unions, AFSCME 741, AFSCME 2325, AFSCME 3090, AFSCME 3947, and SEIU 721, one of the largest unions in LA County, which provides a representative sample. Two of these unions—SEUI 721 and AFSCME 3947—collected information on the race/ethnicity of their workers. For the rest, we can look at union work and how it relates to Black middle-class communities geographically.

Table 4. Workers and Unions Represented by the LA Fed and in the Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Workers</th>
<th>Unions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>By LA Fed</td>
<td>~ 800,000</td>
<td>~ 300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In this Analysis</td>
<td>71,765</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The map of all union workers—71,765 people—reveals concentrations of workers in the City of Los Angeles, City of Compton, Southeast cities, San Gabriel Valley, and Antelope Valley (see Map 3). On the other hand, there are fewer union workers on the west side of Los Angeles and along the coast. Of the unions providing data, two operate in Compton and one in the City of Los Angeles, so an apparent overlap between where people work and where people live is likely.

Relationship Between Black Middle Class and Public Sector Union Workers

We group LA County ZIP codes into five groups based on their percentages of Black middle-class households, from lowest to highest percentages (see Map 1 and Table 5). Visually (Map 3), there is clear overlap between areas with high percentages of Black middle class and public sector union workers; areas such as South LA, the Southeast cities, and Antelope Valley. The overlap is not perfect, however, as high concentrations of public sector union workers
The group (Table 5) with the highest percentage of Black middle class has the most public sector union workers: over 7,500 more public sector union workers than the next highest group. Note: this figure grows to 11,000 when defining the middle class more broadly (as other studies do) as earning between $30,000 and $150,000. The “Highest” group also has the highest rate of public sector union workers per 100 households.

### Table 5. ZIP code-groups based on Black middle class and Public Sector Union Workers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% Black Middle Class</th>
<th>All Households</th>
<th>Public Sector Union Workers</th>
<th>Public Sector Union Workers per 100 Households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lowest</td>
<td>449,120</td>
<td>10,817</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>716,436</td>
<td>14,759</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>791,141</td>
<td>11,635</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>772,146</td>
<td>13,381</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest</td>
<td>678,141</td>
<td>21,215</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Map 1. Public Sector Union Employment and Black Middle-Class Communities
are found in East Los Angeles and the San Gabriel Valley.

The group with a lower percentage of Black middle class has second-highest number and rate of union workers, suggesting the relationship between the Black middle class and union work is not perfect. Note: this finding makes sense as many union workers are of another race, so we should expect union work to be a path to the middle class for other racial groups as well.

**Unionization Rates**

Black workers are equitably represented in union employment compared to the working population. The percentage of Blacks in public sector union jobs (AFSCME 3947 and SEIU 721) is over four times higher than the percentage of Blacks over age 16, a rough approximation of the workforce (see Figure 3 in which each box represents 10 percent of the population or public sector union workforce, respectively). The percentage of people of Other race and White people, by contrast, are underrepresented in union employment.

![Figure 3. Union Workers and Overall Workforce by Race/Ethnicity](image-url)
Survey Results

The survey of Black workers goes beyond understanding the degree to which union workers are Black and whether they live in Black middle-class neighborhoods, and directly answers the question of how union employment gets Black workers into the middle class. For a representation of general benefits by the number of times a worker used the word, see Figure 4.
Tiffany Hall, 911 Dispatcher, Police Service Representative 3, LAPD Communications

“For me, my job helps me take care of my family of four without struggling. I’ve been working since I was 15, but I didn’t have any job that helped me take care of myself like this job. This is my first union job. It’s easy to promote. It’s allowed me to save money and pay off all my debt. I’m happy to say I’m debt free. This is the most money I’ve ever made. Before this, I was earning $11 to $14 an hour. My schedule is all over the place. It’s not a normal type of job. My husband stays at home, and it gives me time to participate in the union more. The union benefits me, but it also benefits us all as a whole. It helps me keep this job I have and makes me feel secure.”
Collee Fields, Training and Services Coordinator, City of Compton

“I’ve worked at my job for 24 years. I have two children. This is my second term as president of the union. I was the treasurer before that. I’ve been active in my union for 15 years. My activity in the union is generational. My mom was a steward my grandfather was in his union when he worked at the MTA. I grew up with the union. My job has allowed me to have stability to know that if my kids were sick, I could take time off if need be. My daughter was on dialysis for eight years before her transplant. When my daughter had her kidney transplant, I had to take off six weeks with FMLA. It allowed us, through Kaiser, to be connected to Cedar Sinai. My daughter’s transplant was devastating because she had a baby at the time. My FMLA allowed me to take care of her and her baby and observe her after her transplant. I was able to understand that she needed to get her life on track, one step at a time, with my help. She’ll be graduating from LA Trade Tech College soon. She wants to be a NICU nurse, it’s always been her dream. It’s been a blessing to have this job. It’s important for the Black community to have greater access public sector jobs like mine. Since connecting people to work is what I do, I know the wages out there...You can’t take care of a family on that. The public sector has given the Black community access to the middle class. Unions in public sector jobs are important too. The city can’t just say they can’t afford it, everything goes, including our jobs. They have to come to the union and let us fix it. The city had massive layoffs a few years ago, but we were able to compromise. So instead of firing more people, they let us cut back on benefits. We show up at city council when there is no contract. The last contract took a year and half to negotiate. It took a lot of fighting. We got the best contract that we could. That was a win. There is strength in numbers. It’s been a blessing to have the job.”
Employment & Benefits

- **72 percent of Black public sector union workers reported that their jobs had good wages and benefits.** That’s nearly three in four workers who strongly agreed or agreed.

- **Two-thirds of Black public sector union workers felt their jobs gave them access to better compensation, training, or workplace protections.** Sixty-seven percent strongly agreed or agreed.

- **Black public sector union workers had higher before-tax income than Black private sector workers.** Fifty-one percent of Black private sector incomes were below $40,000 per year, double the rate of Black public sector union workers. Black public sector union workers were more likely earn incomes in every higher income bracket (see Figure 1). Note: incomes reported exclude benefits.

- **Black public sector union workers received more benefits than Black private sector workers.** Black public sector union workers were more likely to have healthcare, vision, dental, and retirement benefits than Black private sector workers (see Figure 5). Additionally, Black public sector union workers received benefits that no Black private sector worker reported having. These included educational advancement, paid family leave, opportunities to obtain licensing, paid holidays, and paid sick days. Eight workers surveyed mentioned their pension or retirement benefits as a primary benefit of their employment.

- **Half of Black workers felt very connected to their coworkers.** Results were similar for both Black public sector union and Black private sector workers.

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Lorri Thomas, Office Assistant III, City of Compton

"I was able to purchase both my homes by working for the government. In the community I was in, that community was poverty-stricken. I was making more money than most people. Having access to public sector jobs can definitely strengthen the Black community. In my community, I’m more of a leader. My work gave me more leadership roles and stability in community. Public sector work helped to bring the average income in the community higher. The union reached out to me after I passed probation. I got an email at work and I got info on our monthly meeting and I got involved through that. In our jobs, the leadership is political. If we didn’t have union members, they would constantly try to replace us. It’s especially beneficial to the hard workers. I’m a single parent. I worked the private sector previously, but there they can easily get rid of you. There were benefits and I liked how professional it is in the private sector, but government jobs provide more stability. Some people came right out of high school to work public sector jobs. It has given single, African-American women the opportunity to purchase their own homes.”
Family & Community

- **Two-thirds of Black workers were the sole providers for their families.** This held true for Black public sector union and Black private sector workers. Note: one study of mothers as sole providers found that 70.7 percent of Black mothers were sole providers for their families, a far higher rate than for Latina and White mothers.35

- **Two-thirds of Black public sector union workers felt their jobs allowed them to support their families and community.** Sixty-eight percent strongly agreed or agreed.

- **Black public sector union workers said their employment had multiple positive effects on their families.** Black public sector workers said that it provided good pay, benefits, stability, and allowed them to provide for, care for, and help their families.
- **Two-thirds of Black workers were active in their communities.** Nearly half of those workers were active very often. Results were similar for Black public sector union and Black private sector workers.

- **Black public sector union employment helped workers buy houses or stay in desired housing.** More than 50 Black workers told surveyors that employment helped them stay in a home (e.g., “keep the roof over my head”, “purchase a home,” or “pay the bills,”) the largest of which is housing.

- **Black public sector union workers have been in their jobs much longer than Black private sector workers.** Forty-four percent of Black public sector union workers had been in their jobs for more than 15 years (see Figure 6 below). On the other hand, 65 percent of Black private sector workers had worked at their jobs less than five years.

**Discussion**

Our findings that Blacks are equitably represented by local unions in Los Angeles are consistent with previous studies, such as those conducted by the IRLE, demonstrating over-representation of Black workers in unions.

Survey responses regarding wages confirm IRLE findings that Black public sector union workers out-earn Black private sector workers. Studies show many benefits from higher
incomes, including better health,\textsuperscript{36} longer life expectan-
tcies,\textsuperscript{37} and less-constrained housing choices\textsuperscript{38}—which is especially important for people living in gentrifying neighborhoods or those who might experience housing discrimination. A study by the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco showed that life expectancy is correlat-
ed to income, showing that wealth is a barometer for health. For every additional $10,000 earned, people gained one additional year of life. Though it can't be said definitively, higher incomes from unionized public sector jobs could add years life to Black workers at a time when the life expectancy of the Black population is lower than the County average.\textsuperscript{39}

A strength of this analysis is that results are available for LA County and use a greater sample size than similar analyses. A key limitation, however, is the overlapping geographies of Black and Black middle-class populations. Study findings showing relationships between Black populations and union employment, and Black middle class and union employment, would be stronger if controlling for one or the other. In other words, it would be beneficial for future studies to look at the relationship between Black populations and union employment separately from the relationship between Black middle class and union employment.

In addition to the direct benefits that public sector union employment has on Black workers and the Black middle class, it is important to note the impact of public sector work on the greater public good. Many progressive political leaders and strategic initiatives are rooted in public sector jobs. Congresswoman Karen Bass, LA County Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas, CA State Sen-
tator Holly Mitchell, and Congresswoman Maxine Waters have connections to the public sector through past work. Congresswoman Karen Bass and Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas, both former public sector workers, have helped to improve federal and local infrastructure for the foster and relative family care system, supporting thousands of children and families. Senator Holly Mitch-
ell has worked to decrease the infant mortality rates of children in LA County, particularly for Black babies who suffer mortality rates three times higher than White babies in the county.41

Public sector workers are also responsible for helping to move progressive policies and initiatives that have benefitted all Angelenos. The role of public sector union workers’ political contributions and activism has made LA County a safer and better place. Black workers are major part of that historic activism and engagement to win big for their communities and all communities in LA County.
NO ARIZONA
NO WISCONSIN
WE’RE CALIFORNIA
WE STAND FOR RIGHTS FOR ALL
GOOD JOBS LA
Conclusions

- **In LA County, “union work” in the public sector, more often than not, equates to “Black work.”** Black workers make up a sizeable portion of Los Angeles County public sector unions and are equitably represented compared to their share of the population. This supports the argument made by the UCLA Labor Center and others that Black workers rely on union employment.

- **LA County neighborhoods with higher densities of Black middle-class households have more public sector union workers.** While this analysis does not demonstrate that Black public sector union work
causes Black middle-class status, we can report that neighborhoods with more public sector union workers generally have more Black middle-class households. Depending on the definition of middle class used, 7,500 to 11,000 more union workers live in neighborhoods with the greatest densities of Black middle-class households.

- **Public sector union work provides higher incomes, more benefits, and greater job stability for LA County Black workers.** The clearest differences in survey responses from Black public sector union and Black private sector workers were in incomes earned, benefits available, and tenure on the job. An attack on union employment jeopardizes the availability of high-paying, stable jobs with benefits for Black workers.

- **Threats to labor unions in LA County would disproportionately impact LA County Black workers and the Black middle class.** In the face of new federal threats to union employment, it is more important than ever to understand who wins and loses when unions are attacked. This study confirms that Black workers and Black middle-class communities would disproportionately be affected by actions against organized labor. These effects would fall unevenly in LA County, with communities like South LA, the southeast cities, and the Antelope Valley faring the worst due to high numbers of union workers.

- **Unions stabilize LA County communities.** For the unions reviewed here, we can say that people tend to live where they work. Coupled with the lengthy tenure in these jobs, we can infer that union employment protects against forces such as gentrification and displacement, or at least increases housing choices in the face of them. High numbers of Black workers surveyed felt their union work enabled them to buy a home, stay in a home, or pay the bills—the largest of which is housing.
Recommendations

For unions and community:

• partner with Black workers and their communities to expand access, recruitment, and mentoring of Black workers into public sector jobs;

• involve Black public sector members and their families and communities in efforts to strengthen the union and collective bargaining;

• engage union membership to discuss racial discrimination in the workplace by partnering with Black community policymakers and organizations, as an effort to increase union membership and access to work; and

• build cross-class solidarity between the Black working class and the Black public sector union movement to move policies that offer solutions to the Black job crisis and support all Angelenos.
For government:

• implement policies that demonstrate a long-term commitment to a diverse workforce and ensure equitable access for and recruitment from Black communities for public sector jobs;

• recognize that negotiations with public sector unions impact not only workers but also their families and communities;

• provide accurate employee lists and timely notification of new employee orientations to public sector unions, in compliance with AB 119; and

• highlight and celebrate public servants and the important benefits they bring to our communities.

For policymakers:

• stop or reverse privatization, contracting out, and cuts to vital public services, given their economic impact on communities of color in Los Angeles;

• maintain and protect public employee pensions and retirement plans that provide much-needed economic stability in Black communities in LA; and

• pass policies that combat workplace discrimination and help create pipelines for Black workers through mechanisms such as targeted hire.
Endnotes

1 2017 ACS 1-year estimates table S1701. Includes Hispanic Blacks.
2 See RACE COUNTS (racecounts.org) for statistics.
3 See RACE COUNTS (racecounts.org) for statistics.
6 For the purposes of this report, Black workers are those who can be identified as Black based on physical attributes, and therefore economically discriminated against, regardless of ethnicity or nation of origin.
9 Waheed et al. Ready to Work.
20 Ibid.

27 ACS data are mapped with a US Census Bureau 2017 ZCTA Cartographic Boundary File. Public sector union workers are mapped with a 2016 LA County Countywide Address Management System (CAMS) street-specific ZIP code boundary file. All mapping was done with Esri ArcGIS 10.6 software.


29 2017 ACS 1-year estimates table DP05. Includes Hispanic Blacks. That figure increases to 934,751 (9.2 percent of County total) when adding multiracial Blacks. That figure decreases to 794,235 (7.8 percent of County total) when excluding Hispanic Blacks. 

30 2017 ACS 1-year estimates table B19001B. Includes Hispanic Blacks.

31 2017 ACS 1-year estimates table B08105B. Includes Hispanic Blacks.

32 2017 ACS 1-year estimates table S2301. Note: all ACS estimates have margins of error. These margins of error are very small for LA County, but larger for neighborhoods within it. The ACS defines unemployed as, All civilians 16 years old and over are classified as unemployed if they (1) were neither “at work” nor with a job but not at work during the reference week, and (2) were actively looking for work during the last 4 weeks, and (3) were available to start a job. Also included are unemployed are civilians who did not work at all during the reference week, were waiting to be called back to a job from which they had been laid off and were available for work except for temporary illness. Examples of job seeking activities are: Registering at a public or private employment office; Meeting with prospective employers; Investigating possibilities for starting a professional practice or opening a business; Placing or answering advertisements; Writing letters of application; Being on a union or professional register.

33 2017 ACS 1-year estimates table S2301. The ACS defines the labor force participation rate as representing the proportion of the population that is in the labor force. For example, if there are 100 people in the population 16 years and over, and 64 of them are in the labor force, then the labor force participation rate for the population 16 years and over would be 64 percent. The ACS categorizes the following as not in the labor force: All people 16 years old and over who are not classified as members of the labor force. This category consists mainly of students, homemakers, retired workers, seasonal workers interviewed in an off season who were not looking for work, institutionalized people, and people doing only incidental unpaid family work (less than 15 hours during the reference week).

34 AFSCME 741, City of LA Recreation Assistants and Instructors (part of AFL-CIO). AFSCME 741 employees—there are 514—mostly live in the City of Los Angeles. AFSCME 2325, Compton Management Employees. AFSCME 3090 represents over 5,000 Los Angeles City Clerical and Support Services employees across the Southland—from Palmdale to San Pedro and Ontario to the beach, AFSCME 3947. City of Compton Employees. SEIU 721. Over 95,000 workers comprise SEIU Local 721—making it the largest public sector union in Southern California (65,234 are mapped). SEIU Local 721 represents people working in hospitals, foster care, mental health, courts, law enforcement, libraries, street services, beach maintenance, sanitation, water treatment, parks services, and watershed management.

35 Sarah Jane Glynn, Breadwinning Mothers are Increasingly the U.S. Norm (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2016), https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2016/12/19/295203/breadwinning-mothers-are-increasingly-the-u-s-norm.


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