

Race and Gender Equity and State Workers in Connecticut

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The background of the page features a faded, high-contrast image of a protest. Several individuals are visible, some holding signs that read "I AM A MAN". The image is split vertically: the left side is in grayscale, while the right side is a solid yellow color. The title "CONTENT" is centered in the yellow area.

CONTENT

3 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

4 INTRODUCTION

8 EXTREME INCOME INEQUALITY IN CONNECTICUT:
BLACK AND LATINO WORKERS MAKE LESS THAN
WHITE WORKERS

COMPARING RACE AND GENDER: EVEN GREATER
INEQUALITIES

9 THE CONNECTICUT STATE PUBLIC SECTOR: A
MORE EQUAL WORKFORCE

GREATER WAGE PARITY FOR STATE WORKERS –
UNACCEPTABLE GAPS REMAIN

11 STATE GOVERNMENT WORK RAISES INCOMES FOR
BLACK AND LATINO WORKERS

BLACK AND LATINO STATE WORKERS ARE MORE
LIKELY TO BE IN THE TOP THIRD OF BLACK AND
LATINO INCOME RESPECTIVELY – A KEY FACTOR IN
THE GROWTH AND STABILITY OF THE BLACK AND
LATINO MIDDLE CLASS

13 CONCLUSION

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I worked in the private sector -with low wages- and eventually the opportunity as a Direct Service Worker worker at DDS opened. It significantly changed my life. This job has provided me with the ability to advocate for the disabled at my workplace, and in my community. It has provided economic stability for my family, career mobility, ability to care for my children and loved ones. We need to fill these vacancies and positions now. If we're TRULY committed to racial justice as a state, we must have economic justice -where public sector jobs are protected because they serve as one of the only ways of decreasing racism and racial wealth gaps in our state.”

— Georgia Davis





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

No matter what we look like or where we come from, we all deserve employment that provides a pathway to the middle class. Despite those values, so commonly shared among Americans of all colors, wage data from 2019 demonstrates that white workers make more than Black peers at every level of education. “Median earnings for Black men in 2019 amounted to only 56 cents for every dollar earned by white men. The gap was wider than it was in 1970.”¹

Yet mechanisms exist to move beyond rhetorical commitments to racial justice. This report will show that state government employment has greater wage parity than the private sector and provides more opportunities than the private sector for Black and Latino workers to enter the middle class. It highlights the fact that shrinking the state workforce in Connecticut and the state services provided is the wrong policy approach in these times of increasing public need. Further shrinkage of state workforce and services is racially discriminatory in its disparate effects. It forecloses the most promising avenue for the entry of Black and Latino workers into the middle class. It diminishes the sector of the economy with the highest levels of parity between

white workers and workers of color. And it lowers the functioning of state government, encouraging even more damaging austerity and cuts. Shrinking the state workforce is a lose-lose proposition for communities of color and for the state, especially insofar as higher wages for Black and Latino state workers help to raise wages for all workers. Finally, this report argues the state of Connecticut has an affirmative responsibility to drive racial justice and equity as an employer – one that provides solid, stable employment that builds the Black and Latino middle class, and provides essential services to those in need, especially services for poor and working-class communities, Black, brown and white. To do this empty positions must be filled and the public sector must grow. There has been a 21% reduction of state employees since the 2008 Great Recession, and a 32% reduction in the state healthcare workforce over the same period.³ The state must hire at least 3,300⁴ state healthcare workers to stabilize the state healthcare workforce and prevent unnecessary service cuts, suffering and death. Enabling legislation will be necessary to protect the positive economic justice features of Connecticut’s state workforce specifically:

- Bills requiring continuous recruitment and automatic refills for empty positions; zero tolerance for discrimination; and training opportunities that foster upward mobility.

1. Eduardo Porter; Black Workers Stopped Making Progress on Pay. Is it Racism?, New York Times, June 28, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/28/business/economy/black-workers-racial-pay-gap.html?searchResultPosition=1>, accessed March 27, 2022

3. Office of the State Comptroller

4. Vacancy numbers from CT state departments including DCF, DDS, DMHAS, DOC, DPH and the Office of the State Comptroller.

INTRODUCTION

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Whenever you are engaged in work that serves humanity and is for the building of humanity, it has dignity, and it has worth. One day our society must come to see this. One day our society will come to respect the sanitation worker if it is to survive, for the person who picks up our garbage, in the final analysis, is as significant as the physician, for if he doesn't do his job, diseases are rampant. All labor has dignity.”

—Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Speech in support of striking public-sector sanitation workers in Memphis, TN. March 18, 1968

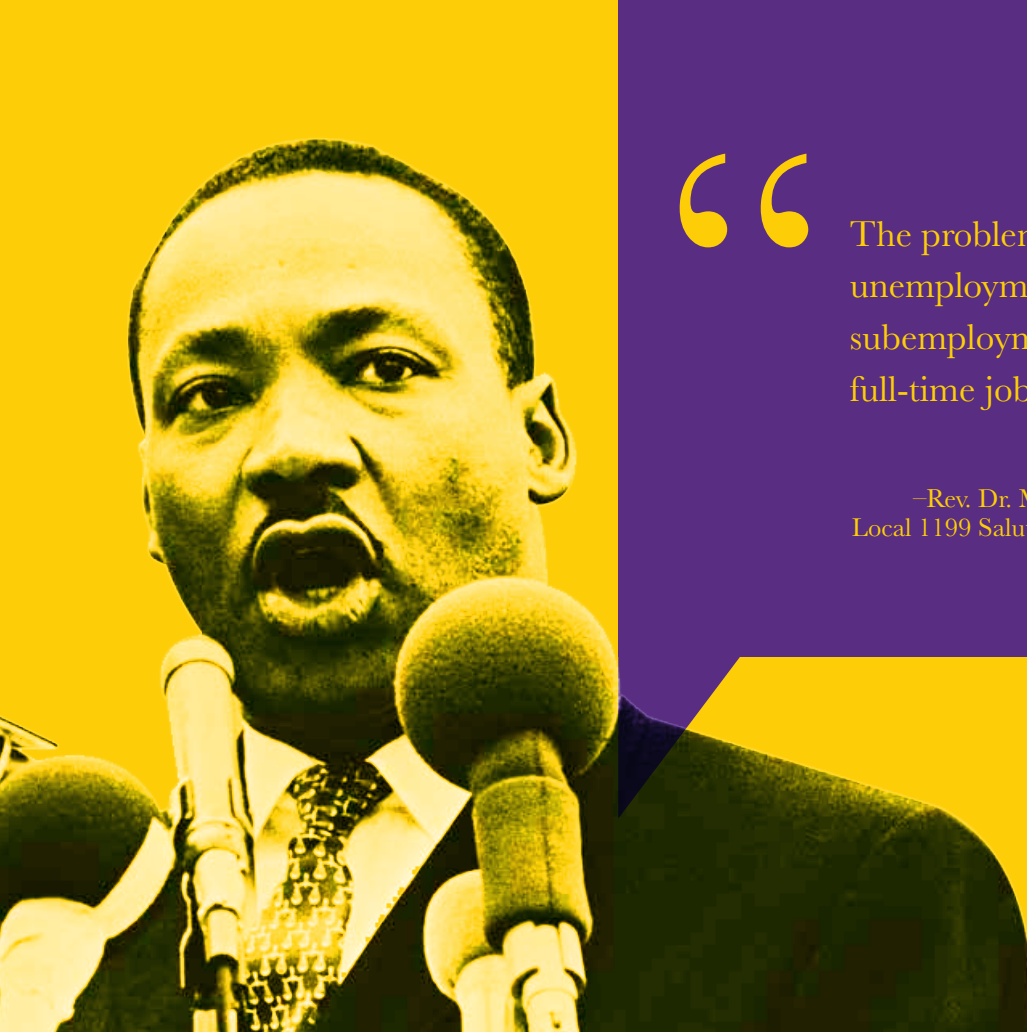


Dr. King's final campaign was fought alongside striking public sanitation workers in Memphis, Tennessee in 1968. Two Black garbage collectors, prohibited by white drivers from riding in the cab, were crushed to death by the compactor while riding along with the trash. Virtually the entire workforce of 1200 impoverished men were Black. In the wake of the tragedy the sanitation workers fought for recognition of their union, better pay and improved working conditions. Their picket signs read “I AM A MAN,” and “UNION JUSTICE NOW!” They insisted their full humanity be honored and respected. They made it clear that this was an intertwined struggle for economic rights and racial justice. King's prophetic “Mountaintop” speech, delivered to the striking workers the night before his assassination, ended on a crescendo of hope- “I've been to the Promised Land.”

In the days following the assassination the Memphis finally recognized the union, and in the midst of the tragedy of King's murder, public sector workers, often with Black workers in the fore, seized upon the hope King's vision for a Promised Land of equality. Hundreds of thousands of public sector workers organized across the country in the 60s, 70s, and 80s. Despite the myriad flaws of organized labor (on racial justice and beyond), unionization provided a tool for Black public sector workers to take strides their white peers.

In many ways the opening of public sector employment laid a foundation for the Black and Latino middle class. Wages for Teachers, Social Workers, Nurses, Transit workers, and Direct Care professionals allow families to buy homes and send their children to college.

In 2022, state workers are engaged in a



“The problem is not only unemployment it is under or subemployment. People who work full-time jobs for part-time wages.”

—Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Address to Local 1199 Salute to Freedom event in New York, NY, March 10, 1968

struggle to maintain and expand the essential public services for the people of Connecticut. They do this knowing that public sector work has been a source of opportunity and relative equity for women and people of color. From the public sector union organizing drives of the civil rights era to the present, Black, Latino and women workers have entered the middle class through state employment. They provide services across all of Connecticut, but they are also a lifeline for poor and working-class communities in need—Black, Brown and white.

Unfortunately, the centrality of public sector work to the success of communities of color has been underappreciated. For decades the state of Connecticut has imposed economic austerity on its citizens, undermining the public sector. Taxes for the wealthy have been cut and public services shrunk. The labor of working people, especially those

who provide what Dr. King called “work that serves humanity,” has been diminished and disrespected. While millionaires and billionaires expanded their wealth, our state budget was balanced on the backs of the disproportionately Black and Latino working-class. Connecticut’s state public-sector workforce was devastated. It was reduced from 63,794 workers in 2008 to 50,393 in 2021.² These were political decisions driven by ideology, not necessity. They have had devastating effects on the health and well-being of our state. And they must be reversed.

As Connecticut prepares to meet the challenges of the 21st century and multiple public crises, including major infrastructure issues, the current SARS-Cov 2 pandemic, and an epidemic of mental health and

2. Source: Connecticut Office of the State Comptroller

addiction service needs, it will need to grow its state public sector, including and especially public human services. These services are critical for the economy and health of the state and its poor, working-class, and middle-class communities—Black, brown, and white.

Connecticut's state public sector is also an important source of employment crucial to upward mobility, particularly for Black and Latino workers. State service has long been a pathway to economic stability and upward mobility for Black workers and this is increasingly the case for Latino workers as well. While the state has a long way to go to achieve equity among Black, brown and white workers, it has been improving over time and is far ahead of the private sector in equality of wages and equality of opportunity. Additionally, the decisive factor in a state worker's ability to fight for better and more equal wages is the power of Connecticut's public sector labor unions—the most effective organizations struggling for racial and gender parity in the workplace and the larger society.

Investing in and growing our state employment sector should be the priority. The state of Connecticut is an essential employer and should set strong standards for compensation, benefits and workplace equality. We need solutions that draw on the knowledge and analysis of our state employees as opposed to giving millions of dollars on consultants like the Boston Consulting Group. BCG's most recent "CREATES" report deemphasizes rebuilding the public sector, asks the state to "simplify interactions with the non-profits and private enterprises that do business with

the state" and advocates contracting out public transit and veteran's services. We can, and must, do better than this.

Our analysis shows how unequal wages are in Connecticut's private sector, where white workers earn considerably more than Black and Latino workers. It also highlights the wide earnings gap between white men and all other groups. And it will show how much more equal wages are in the public sector, a situation brought about by the presence of strong unions and federal law.

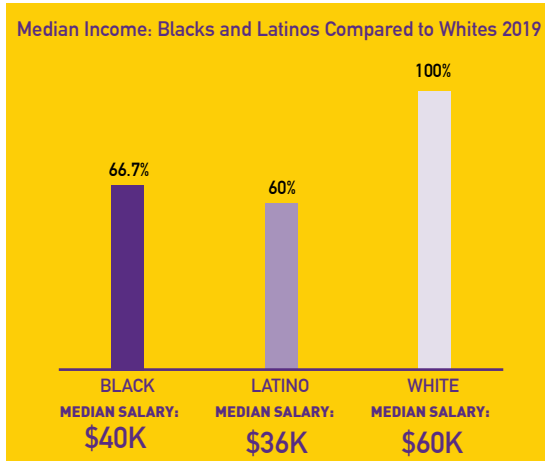
The building of a robust Black and Latino middle class requires a robust state public sector. Black and Latino workers in state public service are considerably more likely to be in the top third of Black and Latino income earners than Black and Latino workers who do not work in state public service. State public sector workers are the building block of stable Black and Latino middle-class communities. Their critical economic role, along with the essential services they provide, make it imperative that we take the opportunity to rebuild and grow our state workforce. The work of the public sector, mental health counseling, addiction counseling, family social work, road maintenance and the myriad essential services we take for granted, is, in the words of Dr. King, "work that serves humanity." It must be expanded and developed, for the benefit of our entire community.³ ■

3. All wage data in this paper comes from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey for 2007 and 2019, and was assembled and analyzed by Steven C. Pitts, PhD, emeritus associate director, University of California, Berkeley, Center for Labor Research and Education.



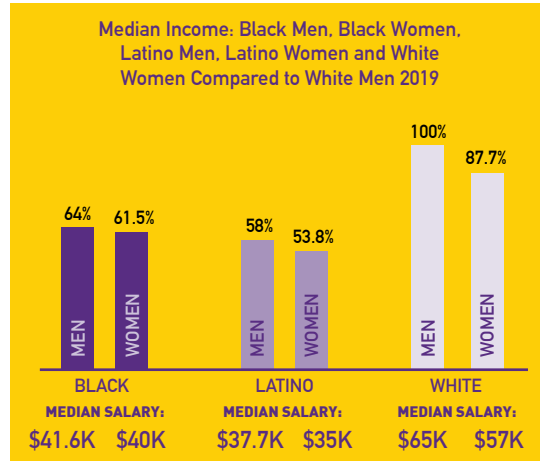
I work in the Hispanic clinic, which is severely understaffed. We provide mental health and addiction services to monolingual Latino community members of the greater Bridgeport and remaining Fairfield County. Many of these individuals are undocumented and have to rely on state assistance for basic needs. This was a team that was decently staffed years ago. Unfortunately, as years go by, staffing has decreased, and the needs have increased. Today, we have two bilingual clinicians to provide psychotherapy to one of the largest DMHAS regions of Fairfield County. Let me repeat, 2 clinicians – what does that say about the value we place on this population?”

—Maribel Agosto



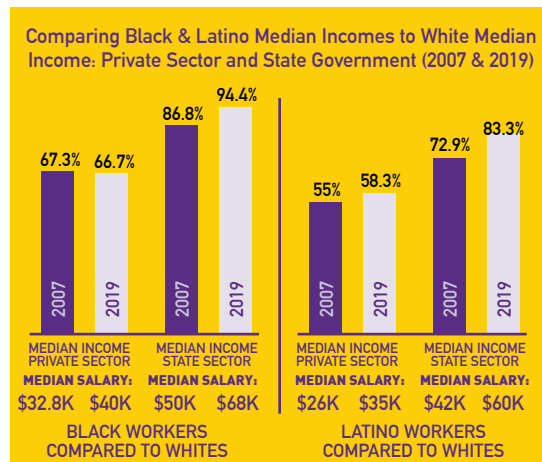
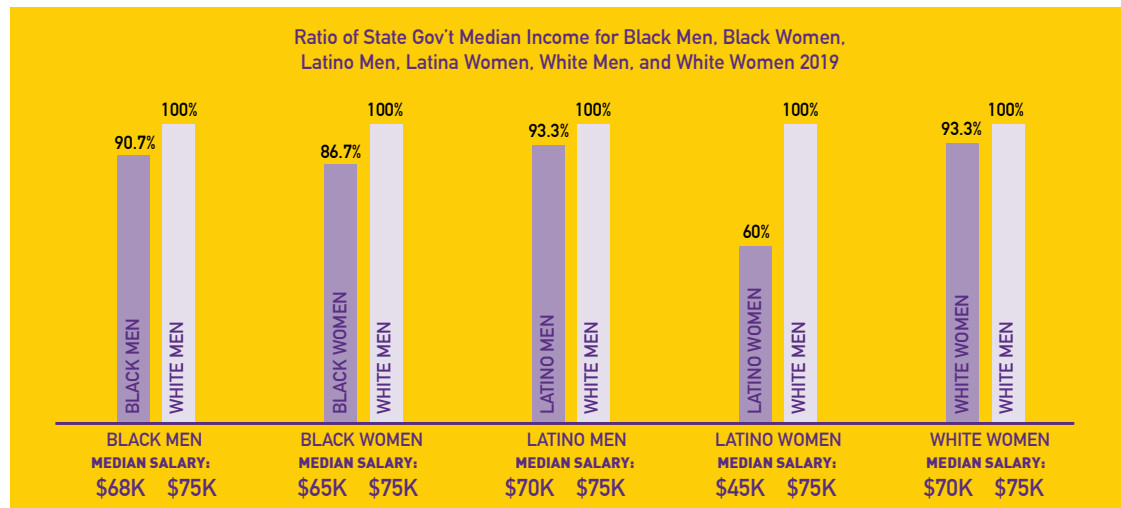
EXTREME INCOME INEQUALITY IN CONNECTICUT: BLACK AND LATINO WORKERS MAKE LESS THAN WHITE WORKERS

Median income for all Black and Latino workers in Connecticut is considerably lower than that of white workers and has remained relatively consistent over time. The Black median income, those at the exact middle of Black income earnings, make about two-thirds of the white median. For Latino workers the ratio is even worse, a mere three-fifths of the white median. Another way of saying this is that Black workers in Connecticut at the median would need their wages raised by approximately 50% to reach wage parity with white workers while Latino workers at the median would need their wage raised by approximately 66% in order to reach wage parity with white workers.



COMPARING RACE AND GENDER - GREATER INEQUALITIES

The differences are stark when we compare Connecticut median income by race *and* gender. In 2019 the median income for Black women was 61.5% of the median income for white men. For Latino women it was 53.8%. To reach parity Black women at the median would need their wages raised by nearly two-thirds and Latino women at the median would need their wages to be nearly doubled to achieve wage parity.



GREATER WAGE PARITY FOR STATE WORKERS – UNACCEPTABLE GAPS REMAIN

*And we can see that for Latina women who work for the state there is a long way to go to obtain parity. At 60% their pay is the most unequal. It is better than the private sector, but not by nearly enough. **All** of the wage gaps are unacceptable, and we must organize and fight to close them. But Black and Latino state workers are far more equal relative to their white co-workers in the state sector than those who work in the private sector.*

THE CONNECTICUT STATE PUBLIC SECTOR: A MORE EQUAL WORKFORCE

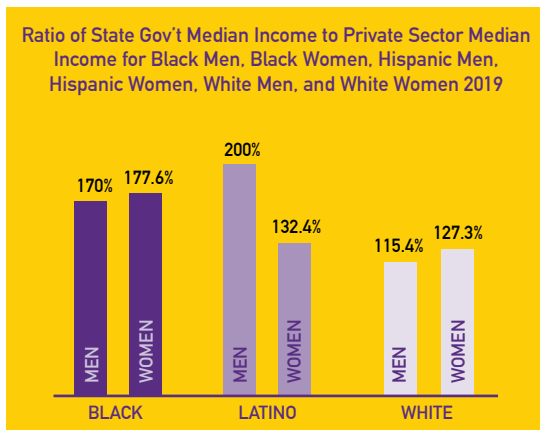
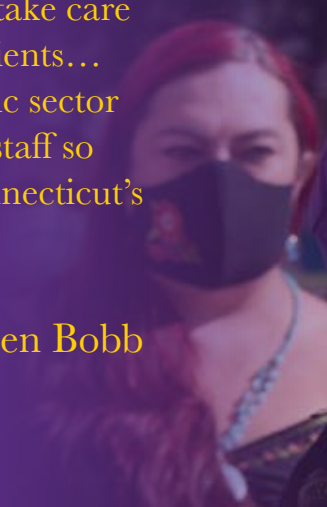
Among Black and Latino *state workers* the gap in median earnings compared to their white state worker peers is much narrower than in the private sector. *And the gap has narrowed over time. Black state worker median income has risen from 86.8% of white state worker median income in 2007 to 94.4% in 2019. Latino state worker median income has risen from 72.9% of white state worker median income to 83.3% over the same period.*



I've been with the state for almost 15 years. My mother worked here, and my grandmother before her was one of the first Black workers on this campus. She was part of the migration from the south in the 50s. We have a lot of Black members who take these jobs to provide for their families because other opportunities aren't there. If you aren't a skilled worker, these jobs provide an opportunity to

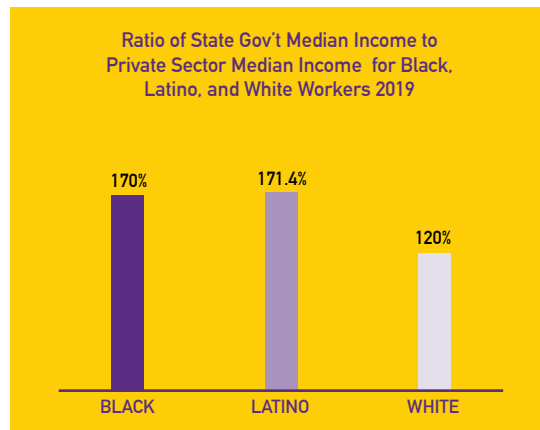
learn skills, buy a house, and provide a college education for our children. If it weren't for these jobs, we wouldn't be where we are now... These jobs drive economic mobility for Black and Brown families, and we take care of Black and Brown patients... we need to expand public sector services by hiring more staff so we can take care of Connecticut's most vulnerable."

—Stephen Bobb



STATE GOVERNMENT WORK RAISES INCOMES FOR BLACK AND LATINO WORKERS

We can see how state wages for all workers, but especially Black and Latino workers, are superior. *State government work plays a significant role in raising incomes for Black and Latino workers.* This is apparent when showing the ratio of state government median income to non-

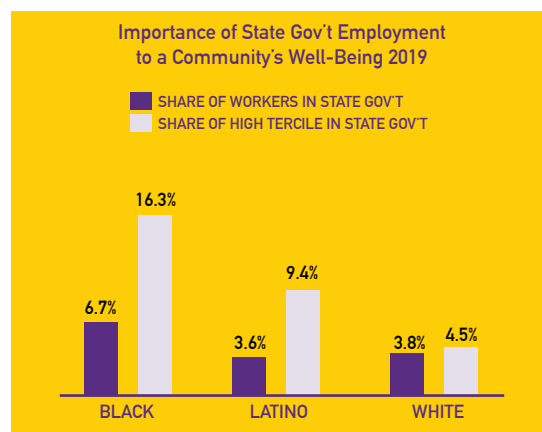


government median income within census racial/ethnic groups. *In 2019 the median income for Black state workers was 170.0% of the median income for Black non-state workers, while for Latino state workers it was 171.4% of the median for Latino non-state workers.*



BLACK AND LATINO STATE WORKERS ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE IN THE TOP THIRD OF BLACK AND LATINO INCOME RESPECTIVELY –A KEY FACTOR IN THE GROWTH AND STABILITY OF THE BLACK AND LATINO MIDDLE CLASS

Black and Latino workers are underrepresented in the top third of income earners. But when you examine those Black and Latino workers who are in the top third of income earners, they are disproportionately state workers. Looking at the Black workforce, 6.7% of all Black workers are in state government; 16.3% of all Black workers in the top third of Black income earners are state workers.



This higher proportion is due to the higher incomes received by Black workers when they are state workers. This reality is true for Latino workers as well. Only 3.6% of all Latino workers are in state government. However, 9.4% of all Latino workers in the top third of Latino income earners are in state government. This important factor of state government correlation to the well-being of Black and Latino communities is not replicated for white communities. In white communities, 3.8% of all white workers are in state government while just 4.5% of the white workers in the top third of income earners are in state government. *Black and Latino workers are more likely to be in the most stable third of income earners if they are state workers. This is essential to Black and Latino community well-being, and to the success of all our communities in Connecticut.*



April 4th is the anniversary of the assassination of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in Memphis. I was there then, in Memphis, a young girl in 1968, when it seemed that death had just about defeated us. And I am still hoping for redemption. The values that Dr. King paid with his own life help guide me through my work every day as an Associate Chaplain for Connecticut's Department of Correction at York Correctional Institution, a maximum-security facility for pretrial and sentenced female offenders ages 15 and older. I see the heavy toll of systemic racism and discrimination on Black, Brown and poor communities. I meet the bright minds and beautiful families who never had a chance. I learn about the growing need for services in

mental health and addiction. I witness that we have yet a long way to go to make America what it ought to be...Connecticut, one of the wealthiest states in one of the wealthiest countries in the world must demolish economic disparities and reverse long-standing racial inequalities. We hope that our state will protect struggling citizens and the vulnerable populations who need public services to survive. We cannot wait any longer. Our families cannot wait another 50 years. We need redemption. We need it now!

—Rev. Joan Cooper Burnett

CONCLUSION

In Connecticut state service provides more economic and professional equality than the private sector. Gains made by civil rights and labor union organizing from the 1960s to the present have made state employment into a source of stable middle class jobs for all. But especially for Black and Latino workers. They are more likely to have near parity with their white peers and are more likely to be in the top third of income, enabling them to anchor stable Black and Latino communities. Therefore we must grow the state sector, fill empty positions, and increase our attention to achieving

parity for female and Black and Latino workers in state service. Anything less is a decision to decimate the Black and Latino middle class and pauperize and immiserate the communities they live in and serve.

The alternative to austerity and the race to the bottom is a stable, healthy society in which human needs and human services are at the center of public policy. A Connecticut where opportunity and life fulfillment are not parceled out according to zip code should be our goal. It will take a robust, expanding public sector to achieve it. ■





