

## Public Sector Jobs Under Attack

Public sector jobs have been on the decline since the Great Recession of 2009 when state and local governments began cutting jobs to compensate for shrinking budgets. These cuts have disproportionately affected women and African Americans because they comprise a large proportion of those employed in public sector versus private sector jobs. Despite healthy steady growth and recovery of the economy, the public sector has failed to add jobs sufficient to return to pre-recession employment levels.

Women and African Americans hold a large portion of public sector jobs, with women making up 60% of the public workforce but only 47% of the private sector workforce. African Americans represent 13% of the public workforce and 10% of the private sector workforce. Approximately one in five African Americans work in the public sector. Thus, when state and local governments were forced to cut costs, women and African Americans were hit the hardest. Nearly 70% of those jobs lost were lost by women - a net loss of over 500,000 jobs. African Americans lost nearly 20% of those jobs cut from the public sector.

One major reason for the large amount of women and African Americans in public sector jobs is the public sector's commitment to equal opportunity employment and strict anti-discrimination laws that govern hiring in the public sector. Since the creation of equal opportunity and affirmative action programs, women and African Americans have gained greater employment opportunities in the economy, particularly in public sector jobs. Due to tight federal laws as well as additional local and state laws, hiring discrimination in the public sector is much lower than in the private sector.

Public sector jobs are so important to women because the gender pay gap is significantly less in public sector than private sector jobs. Women with bachelor degrees earn 17% less than their male counterparts in public sector jobs, but in the private sector they earn 19% less. Women with higher degrees earn 12% less than men in the public sector, compared with 21% in the private sector. The wage discrepancy between races is also less in the public sector than the private sector. In the private sector, African Americans earn 13% less than white workers, but only 2% less than white workers in the public sector. Women are able to reap more monetary rewards for their education and African Americans are subjected to much less racially based wage gaps in the public sector than the private sector.

Not only do public sector jobs have smaller racial and sex based wage gaps, they are also highly unionized. Women hold the majority, 55%, of unionized public sector jobs. When one holds a union job, they generally earn more than their private sector counterparts. Women in public sector jobs who are represented by unions make on average 24% more than public sector workers who are not represented by unions. Unions also help close the gender wage gap. With union represented women making only 10% less than men in comparison to the 21% less than men that non-union private sector women

earn. Union represented public sector workers are also more likely to have employment based health care and pensions.

The benefits of public sector work for women and African Americans are clear: higher wages, lower wage gaps, access to employment based health care, and pensions. This is why it is so important for the public sector to add jobs as the economy strengthens. We need to encourage our local and state governments to increase the amount of public sector jobs.