

Executive Summary | Final Report of the Georgia Municipal Association's Equity and Inclusion Commission: *Our Journey Together Continues*

2020 was a turbulent year across the globe in communities of all sizes and regions. In addition to the effects of the global COVID-19 pandemic, people of color nationwide experienced racial injustice and police brutality, including here in Georgia. GMA's leadership recognized that as an organization, cities must lead with action to root out racism and inequity within their communities.

To that end, in July 2020, GMA created its first Equity and Inclusion Commission to address these issues and develop a long-term plan of action centered around policy change and ongoing training. This 26-member body included elected and appointed municipal officials from each of GMA's twelve districts and was co-chaired by Augusta Mayor Hardie Davis and LaGrange Mayor Jim Thornton. The [Final Report of the Georgia Municipal Association's Equity and Inclusion Commission: *Our Journey Together Continues*](#) embodies the foundational work of this Commission that it hopes will be carried forward in the ongoing mission of GMA and its member cities for years to come.

The motivation to form this Commission was reinforced by results from a survey of municipal elected officials that GMA conducted in late July. Based on 268 responses (8.7% response rate):

45.5% felt racism was not an issue in their city or only to a small extent.

20.2% said their government was not addressing issues of race and equity at all.

Only 53% said city government should be involved in assessing and responding to such issues.

47% disagreed with the view or were not sure if their city should review policies, practices and procedures through an Equity and Inclusion (E&I) lens.

Over the next 18 months, the Commission convened to openly learn, exchange experiences and discuss opportunities to advance E&I goals across GMA and its membership. Bringing an expert voice to set the tone and inform many of these group discussions were speakers such as Ambassador Andrew Young and Former Governor Nathan Deal, along with other experts from academia, industry and local government. [See pages 11-13 of the Final Report for meeting overviews and Appendix A for the Commission's complete work schedule.](#)

The bulk of the Commission's work was organized around issue areas. Members formed workgroups and committed their time to creating specific and actionable recommendations for all cities. These, together with general recommendations for GMA and cities to undertake, were adopted by the Commission in November 2021 and are outlined below. [\[The number in brackets indicates the page in the Final Report for full details.\]](#)

General Recommendations

For GMA: Among the key recommendations is to develop a Municipal Equity and Inclusion Certification Program administered by GMA in partnership with Georgia City Solutions. The Commission also recommends that GMA

create a standing Equity and Inclusion Advisory Council to oversee the implementation of all recommendations and to recommend additional initiatives, programs and policies. [16, 39]

For cities: General recommendations for cities include seeking completion of the Municipal Equity and Inclusion Certification Program, requiring annual Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) training for employees and elected officials and adopting and implementing more equitable policies.

Workgroup-Focused Recommendations for Cities

Housing | *The “American Dream” of owning a home is a reality for only 42% of Black and 47% of Hispanic households, compared to 72% for White households.* When sustainable housing is available to serve residents of all income levels and generations, opportunities for economic prosperity develop community wide. To ensure a community’s housing meets the needs of its citizens, **the Commission’s recommendations for cities include:** completing a community housing assessment, developing a housing affordability action plan and leveraging municipal financial resources such as the Community HOME Investment Program (CHIP) and the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. [20]

Education | *40% of Whites ages 25 and older have a bachelor’s degree or higher, compared to 26% of Blacks and 19% of Hispanics.* While cities in Georgia typically do not play a direct role in providing education, city leaders can exert meaningful influence and recommend policies to improve student outcomes, strengthen schools and ensure that their cities actively address education challenges. **The Commission’s recommendations for cities include:** hosting meetings between the city and school to cultivate or strengthen relationships, implementing actions to support underperforming schools and organizing/supporting child and adult literacy programs in the community. [22]

Health and Wellbeing | *16% of Hispanics and 11% of Blacks are uninsured compared with 6% of Whites.* While cities are not direct providers of health care, municipal leaders play an important role in understanding the needs of all members of the community and advancing policies and initiatives that address issues of inequity in residents’ physical and mental health. **The Commission’s recommendations for cities include:** conducting an assessment of current community health and wellbeing outcomes and providing programs to address food

insecurity, mental health, homelessness and other interrelated issues. [24]

Public Safety and Restorative Justice | *Black and Hispanic Americans make up almost 60% of the prison population, more than twice their share of the adult population.* Equity, inclusion and diversity are essential to ensuring protections and resolving justice for all, and are required for productive public safety agencies and communities. To ensure accountability and transparency in public safety and restorative justice, **the Commission’s recommendations for cities include:** attaining and maintaining GMA Excellence in Policing Certification, adopting a model use-of-force policy and providing anti-bias training for police, fire and/or EMS personnel as applicable. [27]

Community and Economic Development | *White households are less than half as likely to live in poverty than Black or Hispanic families.* For families and communities to thrive, it is vital to address the differing needs of community members and ensure they have access to both employment opportunities that pay a living wage and the support services needed to effectively address barriers to employment and entrepreneurship. **The Commission’s recommendations for cities include:** creating liaisons with economic and community development partners like the local chamber or downtown development authority, increasing diversity in city leadership and internship programs and making development/redevelopment strategies inclusionary. [31]

Community Dialogue and Stakeholder Engagement | *White Georgians are more likely to contact public officials (10.3%) compared to Black (5.9%) or Hispanic (2.7%) Georgians.* Democracy works best when there is broad-based participation by the community, be it a nation, state or city, and when policies are enacted by elected officials

that do not benefit one group over another. To ensure that community members feel welcome, valued and included, **the Commission’s recommendations include:** seeking out stakeholder groups to represent all segments of the community and adopting a city-wide public information communication plan detailing methods and types of public communication. [33]

Workforce Development and Employment | *In an assessment by the University of Georgia’s Carl Vinson Institute of Government for GMA, 85% of responding municipalities reported that it is difficult to attract applicants with the skills to meet municipal government needs.* Local leaders have a responsibility to face workforce challenges by establishing standards and policies to recruit, hire and retain workers that center the principles of equity, diversity and inclusiveness in their government. **The Commission’s recommendations include:** implementing recruitment policies and practices to ensure a diverse applicant pool; incorporating DEI training in employee onboarding and orientation processes; and creating community learning programs on

city government to serve as a municipal workforce pipeline. [36]

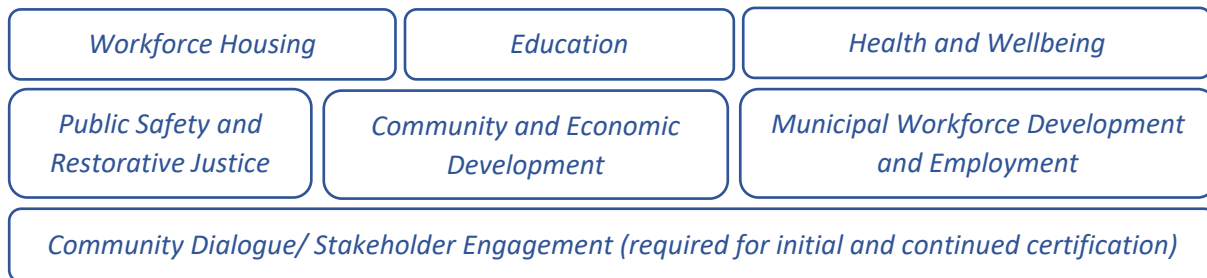
Training and Education | The realization that people and institutions are complex means that ongoing effort is required to educate all stakeholders on what these complexities are and to develop the skills and knowledge to address them. **The Commission’s recommendations include:** encouraging elected officials and staff to participate in GMA’s “Embrace” learning series, participating in a needs survey to support development of future training and providing Emotional Intelligence training for all public safety employees. [37]

City Policies | City leaders have an important duty and opportunity to advance equity and inclusion through structural changes to local government. By applying a DEI lens to functions of local government, city leaders can improve outcomes for the entire community. **The Commission’s recommendations include:** making DEI part of the comprehensive planning process and analyzing and addressing equity and inclusion in procurement policy, resource allocation and personnel policies. [38]

To encourage implementation of the Commission’s recommendations through public recognition, the Commission recommends the creation of a Municipal Equity and Inclusion Certification Program and supports the Excellence in Policing Initiative:

Municipal Equity and Inclusion Certification Program

This program would recognize cities that adopt policies and practices to promote E&I within their municipal government and community at large. Cities may achieve certification based on seven categories:



Reviewing and revising city policies accordingly would be a prerequisite to apply. Since cities each have their own challenges and levels of resources, and with the broad array of categories, four tiers of certification are achievable based on the number of categories a city chooses to address. See Appendix B of the Final Report for more details on the certification process.

Excellence in Policing Initiative

In Spring 2021, GMA created this initiative to recommend model policies, training modules and best practices for law enforcement agencies in Georgia that can be utilized as part of the Municipal E&I Certification Program. This committee, co-chaired by College Park Mayor Bianca Motley Broom and LaGrange Police Chief Lou Dekmar, is comprised of 16 members ranging from mayors, police chiefs, lawyers, a community activist and a mental health expert. The group's work has **four focus areas:** personnel policies, critical task policies, role of technology in policing and criminal justice reform. [40]

Georgia City Solutions

Last but not least, GMA's nonprofit subsidiary, Georgia City Solutions (GCS), maintains Equity and Inclusion as one of its core pillars driving programmatic work to build vibrant, economically prosperous and well-managed cities, and improve the quality of life of municipal residents. The "EMBRACE" learning series is one of GCS' initiatives, along with additional innovative E&I resources and tools that the Equity and Inclusion Commission has endorsed. [41]

The final report of GMA's Equity and Inclusion Commission marks only the first step to creating positive and lasting outcomes in the areas of diversity, equity and inclusion. The Commission calls on all Georgia cities to join in this effort to ensure the doors to civic participation, economic prosperity and better quality of life in their communities are open to all.