

## The agenda for Georgia's entrepreneurs: 2025 legislative session

Small Business Majority has created a comprehensive state policy agenda to ensure entrepreneurship is at the center of a thriving and inclusive economy in Georgia. The state's 1.3 million small businesses comprise 99.7% of all businesses in the state, and they employ 1.7 million residents—nearly half of all Georgia employees. This is why it's critical that state lawmakers enact policies and programs to support and empower these entrepreneurs, guaranteeing they have access to capital to start and grow their business, affordable and quality healthcare and benefit programs that will make it easier for them to attract and retain talented employees.

### Increase equitable access to capital and opportunities for entrepreneurs

Entrepreneurs—particularly women, people of color, rural communities and other under-resourced populations—face significant hurdles accessing capital. Increasing access to capital and expanding opportunities for marginalized communities is key to driving more inclusive economic growth. State policymakers can address funding barriers in the financial market by adopting these policy recommendations.

- **Continue to support Georgia's implementation of the State Small Business Credit Initiative (SSBCI) programs.** This includes working alongside the Office of Economic Development and Department of Community Affairs to ensure these programs equitably target micro- and BIPOC-owned businesses through impactful lending and investments.
- **Continue state investments into federally matched business support services,** such as Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs) and Women Business Centers (WBCs). These centers provide low and no-cost critical counseling and assistance by professional staff to all entrepreneurs, especially to women and people of color, helping small business owners maximize their potential for creating a positive economic impact.
- **Expand protections for small business borrowers by ensuring transparent and fair lending practices.** Currently, the federal Truth in Lending Act (TILA) requires that consumer creditors disclose critical financing information, including annual percentage rate (APR), in a clear and comparable format; however, these requirements are not extended to commercial financing. Without a federal law, state lawmakers must pass a law to ensure Georgia small business owners have access to transparent and fair financing products.
- **Implement a small business set-aside program to promote equity and increase participation among minority- and women-owned businesses** through a structured procurement system that ensures fair access to state contracts, strengthens small business growth, and builds a more inclusive economy. To support this initiative, Georgia should pass legislation to create a Division of Supplier Diversity within the Department of Administrative Services, tasked with establishing purchasing goals for disadvantaged businesses (MWBE/DBE) in state procurement processes. This approach will enhance opportunities for under-resourced small businesses, driving economic development across Georgia.

### Expand healthcare accessibility and affordability

Georgia is one of only 10 states that has yet to expand its Medicaid program, and 1.4 million Georgians do not have health insurance. Many Georgia entrepreneurs and small business employees struggle to access healthcare, as they fall into the so-called "coverage gap" (individuals whose income is above Medicaid eligibility but falls below the limit for marketplace premium tax credits). In 2024, for the first time since the Affordable Care Act was enacted, Georgians were unable to access the federal website to enroll in health insurance. Instead, those who previously purchased coverage through healthcare.gov can now explore plans via Georgia Access, the state's newly established marketplace exchange. To reduce the

number of uninsured residents and make healthcare more affordable for the small business community, Georgia can implement strategic policies aimed at strengthening healthcare markets and expanding coverage options.

- **Expand Medicaid eligibility coverage.** Closing Georgia’s coverage gap would cover [359,000 Georgians](#) and create 56,000 new jobs. A Small Business Majority [survey](#) found 6 in 10 Georgia small businesses support expanding the state’s Medicaid program.
- **Protect and expand access to reproductive health services** to foster entrepreneurship, improve labor participation and strengthen the workforce. Access to these services is crucial for the well-being and economic stability of entrepreneurs, particularly women, and is a key factor in enabling them to fully participate in the workforce. [Our polling](#) shows that women small business owners strongly support policies that ensure and expand access to reproductive healthcare, which is critical to many as they start and grow their businesses.
- **Ensure greater transparency in hospital pricing.** The consolidation of hospitals and healthcare systems is significantly driving up the costs of healthcare, making it more challenging for small business owners and their employees to afford. Increasing transparency in billing and competition in the market will be paramount to supporting the small business ecosystem as they continue to navigate financial hardships.
- **Pass legislation that would lower prescription drug prices.** Rising pharmaceutical costs continue to impact small business’ bottom lines. The Lowering Prescription Drug Costs for Patients Act can help level the playing field for small businesses by imposing penalties on pharmacy benefits managers for unfair practices, enhancing financial transparency, and providing a competitive advantage to small businesses, all contributing to a healthier business environment and affordable healthcare for employees.
- **Reinstate Georgia’s access to the federal healthcare marketplace.** Nearly 1.3 million Georgians and their families turned to the ACA health insurance marketplace for their health coverage in 2024. Now Georgians are required to purchase health insurance through the Georgia Access Model, which heavily relies on private insurance brokers to enroll individuals in health plans, without many of the protections that the federal system provides.

## **Ensure Georgia entrepreneurs and small business employees have access to paid family leave, retirement and other benefits they need to succeed**

Entrepreneurs and small business employees need a level playing field in order to compete with larger companies, which offer benefits that smaller businesses struggle to provide. Georgia lawmakers must address the particular challenges small business owners face in offering essential benefits to attract and retain skilled workers and close a critical gap in access to retirement and paid family and medical leave for small businesses. These proposals have widespread support among Georgia small businesses.

- **Pass legislation to create a ‘work and save’ state-sponsored retirement savings program in Georgia.** Many small business owners would like to offer essential benefits such as retirement planning but are unable to offer them on their own. Establishing and implementing a state-run retirement savings program would help more small businesses, their employees and independent entrepreneurs access retirement saving opportunities without creating additional financial and operational burdens.
- **Create a paid family leave and medical leave insurance program** that would allow small business employees and the self-employed to access parental leave or to handle serious health conditions for themselves and family members. These programs have been implemented in several states and are funded through modest employee payroll deductions. Research has found they have not placed a burden on small businesses, allowing them to facilitate access to this benefit that small businesses typically cannot afford.
- **Advocate for greater investments in the Georgia fiscal budget for childcare providers,** which includes increasing subsidies and tax incentives for home-based childcare

providers. Recognizing that many of these providers are entrepreneurs and small business owners themselves, it's crucial to create a supportive environment that encourages their growth and makes childcare more affordable for small business owners and their workers. Allocating crucial investments into the childcare industry will boost affordability and accessibility, ultimately supporting Georgia's small businesses and their workforce.

- **Lower costs for home-based childcare providers by updating occupational licenses and regulations.** By modernizing regulations and offering business licensing education, we can encourage more individuals to launch childcare ventures to meet the needs of the small business workforce. Lawmakers should conduct a comprehensive assessment of how current regulations impact home-based childcare providers. Additionally, we propose exploring statewide legislation to align local policies (e.g., zoning, permits) with Department of Early Care and Learning licensing requirements, thus reducing barriers and allowing family childcare providers to operate at full capacity and fostering small business success.

### Expand the small business workforce via criminal justice reforms

Small businesses employ nearly half (42%) of the private workforce in Georgia, opening a powerful role for small employers to play in addressing the labor shortage and engaging individuals seeking a second chance. In Georgia, the unemployment rate for people with criminal records is [five-times higher](#) than the state-wide unemployment rate. According to [recent polling](#) from Small Business Majority, Georgia small businesses are supportive of criminal justice reforms that would remove barriers to employment or entrepreneurship opportunities for formerly incarcerated individuals. These policy reforms include:

- **Opening access to occupational licenses.** One in seven jobs require an occupational license. Because 40% of adult Georgians have a criminal record, they may be barred from obtaining these licenses. Occupational licenses can be a barrier to well-qualified individuals who are seeking to start a small business or obtain good jobs. Every licensing applicant with a criminal record risks denial because of their record, even if it is old, pardoned or expunged. Commonsense policy solutions can open opportunities for justice-impacted individuals, reduce recidivism, fill gaps in workforce shortages and boost local economies.
- **Updating and modestly expanding current expungement law.** After substantial reforms allowed for [expungement of certain convictions in 2020](#), small adjustments to the law can help support Georgia jobseekers and address workforce shortages for small businesses. Allowing more than two misdemeanor convictions to be expunged in a person's record would open opportunities for those with minor records and expand the pool of job applicants.