

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 21, 2026

The Honorable Orice Williams Brown
Acting Comptroller General of the United States
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Ms. Williams Brown:

We write to request that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) conduct a review of outcomes for Black women in federal workforce programs, including (1) outcomes for Black women who participate in programs under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and (2) the rates at which Black women apply for and receive Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits. While GAO has reported in the past on women's representation and pay in the workforce, more research and analysis are necessary because data show that Black women face unique and pervasive barriers in the workforce.

Since January 2025, Black women have experienced job loss at a rate that far exceeds their representation in the workforce. According to the Economic Policy Institute, Black women's employment rate fell by 1.4 percentage points in 2025 while Black men's and White women's employment rates fell by no more than 0.5 percentage points each. Additionally, according to the Institute for Women's Policy Research, Black women accounted for 54.7 percent of all female job losses in 2025 while making up only 14.1 percent of the workforce.¹

These employment losses for Black women were particularly pronounced among college graduates and public-sector workers.² Analysis from the Institute for Women's Policy Research found that Trump administration federal sector layoffs impacted Black women most, with a 30 percent drop in federal government employment compared to losses of 11.6 percent for all women and 8.1 percent for all men.³

Black women have also historically received lower pay than other demographic groups. GAO reported in 2023 that Black women in management positions earned \$0.59 for every dollar earned by White men, while White women earned \$0.70.⁴ As of 2026, the pay gap for Black women was 63 cents in all positions and 65 cents for full-time, year-round workers.⁵ 2026

¹ See Institute for Women's Policy Research: *One Year Into Trump's Second Term, Black Women Face Disproportionate Job Losses*, February 10, 2026

² See Economic Policy Institute: *Black women suffered large employment losses in 2025—particularly among college graduates and public-sector workers*, February 10, 2026.

³ See Institute for Women's Policy Research: *One Year Into Trump's Second Term, Black Women Face Disproportionate Job Losses*, February 10, 2026

⁴ See GAO *Women in the Workforce: Underrepresentation in Management Positions Persists, and the Gender Pay Gap Varies by Industry and Demographics* (GAO-23-106320), March 14, 2023.

⁵ Equal Rights Advocates, "Black Women's Equal Pay Day," 2026.

marked the third consecutive year that the gender pay gap widened, indicating worsening economic outcomes for all women.

Further, according to the Center for Law and Social Policy, among all racial and ethnic groups that complete workforce training programs, Black workers have the highest employment rates, yet the lowest earnings.⁶ The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies found that between March 2019 and April 2020, after attending WIOA-funded programs, Black workers' wages were just 78 percent of White workers' wages.⁷ In addition, in 2022, GAO found substantial racial and ethnic disparities in the receipt of pandemic UI benefits in three of four selected states. For example, in two states, the percentage of Black applicants who received pandemic UI benefits was about half that of White applicants.⁸

In light of these facts, we request that GAO address the following questions regarding Black women in the workforce:

1. What is the participation rate for Black women in workforce development programs under WIOA (including the Adult & Dislocated Worker Program, Vocational Rehabilitation, Registered Apprenticeship Programs, Reentry Employment Opportunities Program, Job Corps, Youth Build, and other WIOA-funded programs) and what is known about barriers to Black women's participation in these programs?
2. What are the post-program outcomes for Black women who participate in WIOA programs (employment, earnings, credential attainment, and measurable skill gains) compared to those outcomes for other demographic groups?
3. What is known about the rates at which Black women apply for and receive UI benefits compared to other demographic groups, and what factors may affect these rates?
4. What actions do experts recommend that the Department of Labor and Congress take to improve labor force outcomes for Black women served by WIOA programs and the UI system?
5. What information do we have about the participation and outcomes for Black women in federal workforce programs other than WIOA?

Sincerely,

⁶ Center for Law and Social Policy, *Updating WIOA to Empower Workers and Create Shared Prosperity*, April 2022.

⁷ Alex Camardelle, *Principles to Support Black Workers in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act*, Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, 2021,

⁸ GAO, *Pandemic Unemployment Assistance: Federal Program Supported Contingent Workers Amid Historic Demand, but DOL Should Examine Racial Disparities in Benefit Receipt*, GAO-22-104438 (Washington, D.C.: June 7, 2022).



Lisa Blunt Rochester
United States Senator



John Hickenlooper
United States Senator