

# Augusta Region

# Economic Mobility – Cradle to Career Visioning Session September 2025

Please join the HUB Augusta Collaborative and its partners on September 30, 2025 for an interactive session to explore our region’s vision for economic mobility.

The session will bring together nonprofit, private, and public sector leaders to begin exploring our upward mobility goals and identify how we can support our communities from cradle to career, ensuring a continuum of support and opportunity.

It will be facilitated in collaboration with Delivery Associates, and we will be joined by Blue Meridian Partners.



## In preparation for the session, please reflect on the following guiding questions:



- **Setting a regional vision for upward mobility:** It's 2035, and Augusta is a national model for cradle-to-career economic mobility. What measurable, moveable, and meaningful outcomes are residents (children, youth, adults, families) and communities experiencing that show this success?
- **Mapping the Cradle to Career ecosystem:** What existing programs, initiatives, and partnerships are showing promising impact and improving upward mobility outcomes (e.g., academic readiness, literacy, degree completion, employment)? Where are there opportunities for acceleration or scaling? Where are there gaps in coverage or limited impact, indicating that new programs or solutions might be needed? *Feel free to think across the cradle to career continuum (e.g., early childhood to adulthood / workforce) or to focus on your area of expertise.*
- **Delivering lasting impact:** What would it take to deliver a bold vision and achieve population-level improvements in upward mobility across our region? What additional collaboration and resources are needed? *Consider funding and non-financial resources, such as new partnerships, data or other infrastructure needs, technical assistance, and policy changes.*



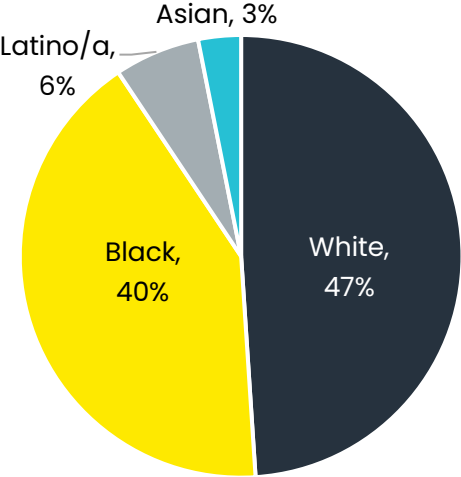
# The Augusta region is a diverse region that faces high poverty and financial hardship

The Augusta region (including Richmond, Columbia, Burke, McDuffie, Jefferson, Aiken, & Edgefield counties) is a diverse region of ~644K people that faces high poverty and financial hardship.

Augusta region population by county

State	County	Total Population (2024)
Georgia	Richmond	206K
	Columbia	167K
	Burke	24K
	McDuffie	22K
	Jefferson	15K
South Carolina	Aiken	179K
	Edgefield	29K
All counties		644K

Augusta region population by race



15% of the population lives in rural areas

**11%** of residents live below the federal poverty level

**34%** of residents earn above the federal poverty level but not enough to cover the basics (also known as ALICE – Asset Limited Income Constrained, Employed)

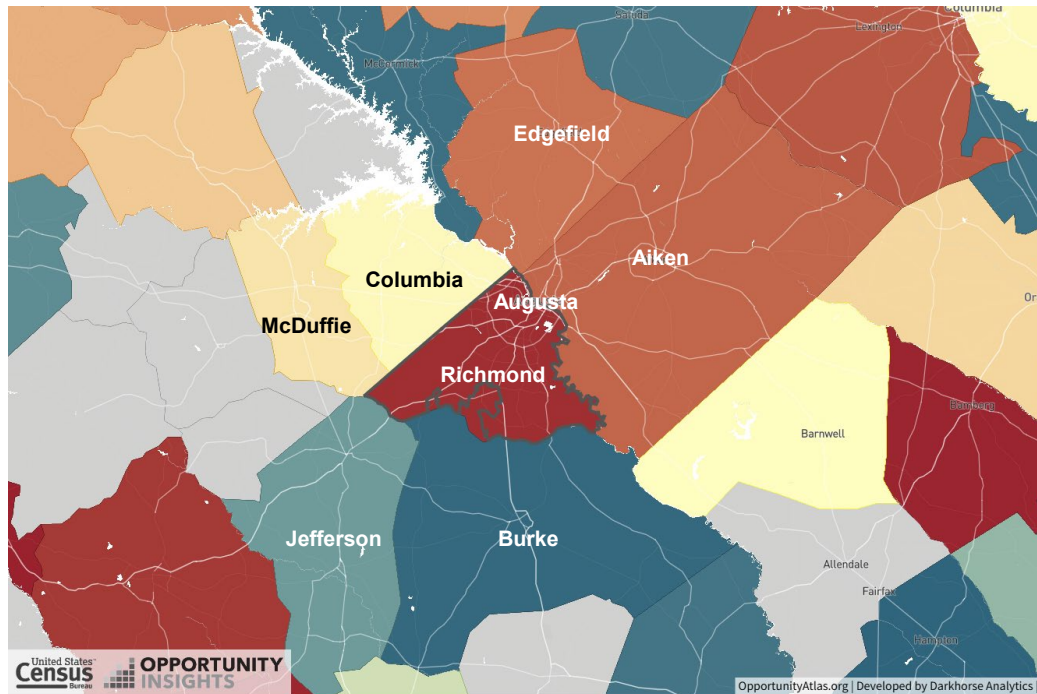
**1 in 5** children, under age 18, in the Augusta-Richmond GA-SC Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) live in poverty

Sources: U.S. Census Population Division data for 2024; United for ALICE county data for 2023

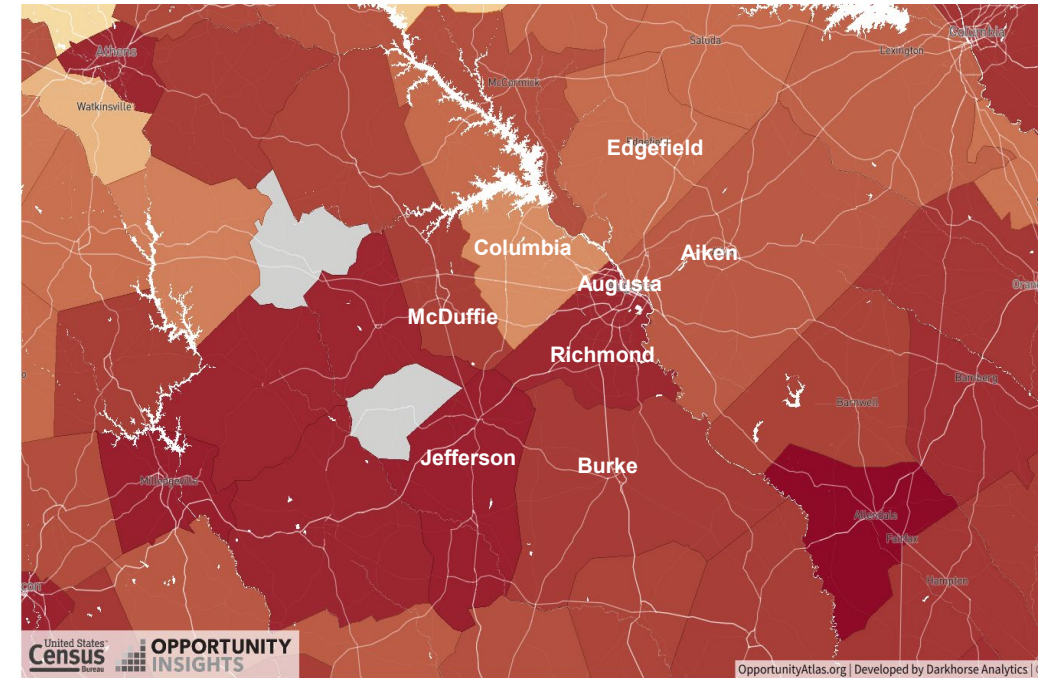
# The region's poverty rate is persistent, and low-income children experience little upward economic mobility as adults

Augusta's most populous counties (Richmond, Aiken) have experienced increases in household poverty rates since 1990; though smaller counties, such as Burke and Jefferson, have experienced notable declines in household poverty. Across all counties, economic mobility for low-income residents is low: Children born in 1992 to low-income parents (bottom 25<sup>th</sup> percentile in income) average less than \$30K in household income when they turned 27 in 2019.

**Change in poverty rate (residents with household incomes below the federal poverty level) between 1990 and 2005–2009**



**Household income at age 27 for children born in 1992 to low-income parents by county**



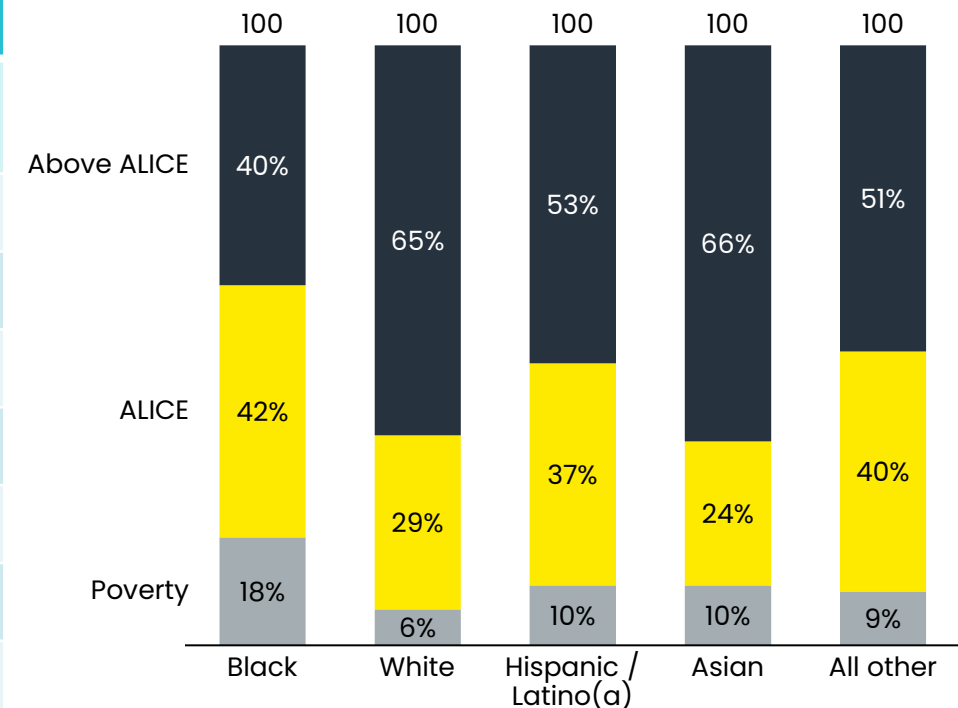
# Poverty and financial hardship in the Augusta Region varies by county and by race

Richmond and Burke counties face significantly higher poverty rates and lower median household incomes compared with Columbia County. Black residents are 3x as likely than white residents to live in poverty and almost 1.5x as likely to be a part of the ALICE population (e.g., above the FPL but not earning enough to cover the basics).

Augusta Region Population and Financial Data by County

County	Population Data (2023, 2024)					Financial Data (2023)			
	Total population	Black	White	Hispanic	Asian	Median Household Income	Poverty rate	ALICE rate	Poverty + ALICE rate
Richmond	206K	55%	33%	6%	2%	\$51,985	22%	33%	55%
Columbia	167K	18%	64%	8%	5%	\$96,540	9%	26%	35%
Burke	24K	45%	49%	3%	<1%	\$50,739	23%	34%	57%
McDuffie	22K	40%	53%	4%	<1%	\$54,058	17%	37%	54%
Jefferson	15K	51%	44%	3%	<1%	\$96,761	19%	37%	56%
Aiken	179K	24%	64%	7%	1%	\$67,480	15%	25%	40%
Edgefield	29K	31%	58%	6%	<1%	\$67,092	18%	29%	47%
All counties	644K	40%	47%	6%	3%	\$69,648	16%	29%	45%

Augusta Region: Household Financial Status by Race / Ethnicity



# Augusta region shows increases in growth, prosperity, and inclusion but comparison with peer MSAs suggests opportunity for improvement

A recent analysis ranked 56 metro areas with 500K-1M residents based on their economic trends from 2013-2023. The table shows Augusta MSA's trend and rank for each measure.

Augusta-Richmond GA-SC MSA's economic trends and rank among peer regions

Category	Measure	Value change from 2013-2023	Rank among 56 metro areas with 500K-1M residents
<b>Growth</b>	Change in jobs	+20%	23
	Change in Gross Metropolitan Product (GMP)	+25%	31
	Change in jobs at young firms (entrepreneurship)	+8%	47
<b>Prosperity</b>	Change in average annual wage	+3%	42
	Change in standard of living	+15%	32
<b>Inclusion</b>	Change in employment rate	+7%	14
	Change in median earnings	+18%	38
	Change in relative poverty rate	-3%	31
<b>Racial inclusion</b>	Change in white/people of color employment rate gap	-5%	14
	Change in white/people of color median earnings gap	-\$2K	22
	Change in white/people of color relative poverty rate gap	-5%	14
<b>Geographic inclusion</b>	Change in top/bottom neighborhoods employment rate gap	+2%	25
	Change in top/bottom neighborhoods median household income gap	+\$12K	39
	Change in top/bottom neighborhoods relative poverty rate gap	-1%	43

- Augusta ranks high (1-20)
- Augusta ranks moderately (21-40)
- Augusta ranks low (41-56)

Augusta region shows progress in growth, prosperity and inclusion; however, its relatively moderate to low rankings in comparison with similarly sized regions suggests there is room for improvement.

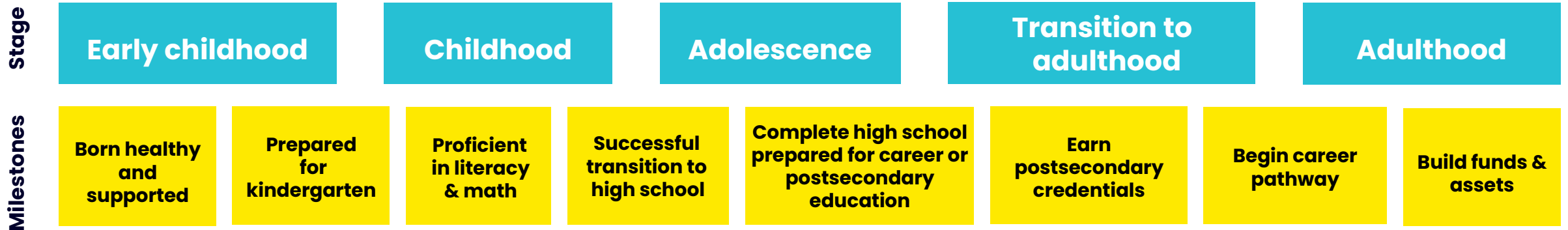
Strategies to connect underserved residents to emerging jobs and support inclusive economic growth and upward economic mobility across the life span are urgently needed.

Note: Augusta Richmond County MSA includes Richmond, Burke, McDuffie, Columbia, Aiken, and Edgefield counties.

Source: Brookings Metro Monitor 2025

# A Cradle-to-Career Framework for Economic Mobility

To inform our discussion, we're sharing a common framework on how economic and social mobility can be assessed and supported from early childhood through adulthood – from cradle to career – and brief insights and data on relevant outcomes, by cradle to career life stage, for the Augusta Region.



## Enablers

*Creates the foundation necessary for individuals or communities to achieve economic mobility and well-being*

- **Social Environment and Political Capital**, e.g., supportive personal relationships and networks
- **Economic Environment**, e.g., secure career pathways
- **Built Environment**, e.g., access to reliable housing, amenities and transportation
- **Public Systems and Infrastructure**, e.g., government infrastructure exists on all levels to address market failures and gaps towards economic mobility

## Impediments

*Barriers that hinder individuals or communities from achieving mobility – often rooted in generational poverty and systemic issues*

- **Health and Wellbeing**, e.g., poor mental or physical health
- **Trauma and Safety Risks**, e.g., adverse childhood experiences, exposure to violence
- **System Involvement**, e.g., child welfare system involvement, criminal justice involvement

# Early Childhood, Childhood, & Adolescence

During early childhood through adolescence, Augusta area residents experience lower economic mobility related outcomes compared with the U.S. overall. Strengths include Pre-K enrollment and high school completion. Challenges include childhood reading and math proficiency, which generally lag state rates but vary by county.

**Early childhood to adolescence outcomes for U.S., GA, SC overall and Augusta Region counties**

Milestones	Select Metrics	U.S. overall	GA state	Richmond	Columbia	Burke	McDuffie	Jefferson	Aiken	Edgefield	SC state
<b>Born healthy and supported</b>	Low birthweight (2017-2023 Avg)	8%	10%	13%	8%	12%	12%	13%	9%	11%	10%
<b>Enter school ready</b>	Pre-K enrollment of 3-4 yr-olds (2023)	53%	55%	64%	48%	75%	63%	50%	67%	34%	45%
<b>Read by Third Grade</b>	3 <sup>rd</sup> grade reading proficiency (GA:202x; SC:2025)	-	39%	20%	60%	20%	38%	29%	43%	47%	48%
<b>Transition to High School</b>	8 <sup>th</sup> grade math proficiency	-	47%	20%	65%	31%	34%	19%	22%	33%	30%
<b>Complete HS prepared for postsecondary or career</b>	High school attainment (2024)	90%	89%	88%	93%	84%	86%	81%	85%	82%	85%

Note: Reading and math proficiency data is based on state information (GA state for GA counties and SC state for SC counties) and not available for the U.S. overall

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau CPS 2022; H.S. attainment: U.S. Census ACS 5-year estimates, 2023; GA Milestones Assessment System; County Health Rankings and Roadmap; SC Dept. of Ed.,2025

# Transition to Adulthood & Adulthood

During the transition to adulthood and adulthood, Augusta area residents experience relatively low outcomes for postsecondary education. Postsecondary degree completion rates for individual counties are markedly lower than state and U.S. overall averages. Labor force participation rates are generally on par with the U.S. and state averages; although, some (more rural) counties experience notably lower rates (e.g., Burke, McDuffie, Jefferson).

## Transition to adulthood and adulthood outcomes for U.S., GA, SC overall and Augusta Region counties

Milestones	Select Metrics	U.S.	GA State	Richmond	Columbia	Burke	McDuffie	Jefferson	Aiken	Edgefield	SC state
Earn postsecondary credentials	Postsecondary enrollment post H.S. (within 16 mos., 2024)	62%	63%	56%	72%	47%	53%	55%	-	-	-
	Share of adults with an Associate's degree or higher (2023)	48%	41%	34%	51%	25%	27%	18%	41%	31%	36%
	Share of adults with bachelor's degree or higher (2023)	37%	34%	24%	38%	14%	18%	11%	31%	21%	33%
Attain a Job with a Path	Teens not in school or working (% of 16-19 year-olds)	-	8%	9%	6%	5%	5%	6%	5%	7%	8%
	Labor force participation rate (2023)	62%	64%	63%	63%	57%	57%	54%	59%	54%	61%

Note: Postsecondary enrollment within 16 months of graduation is based on GA state data and not available for SC.

Sources: GA Gov. Office of Student Achievement Postsecondary CII Report, 2024; State of ALICE in Georgia, 2025; U.S. Census ACS Survey 2023

# Enablers and impediments across the life span

There are several notable economic mobility enablers and impediment areas across the Augusta region. On built environment (e.g. housing, internet) and health measures, Richmond generally performs worse than the U.S. overall and GA state. More rural counties generally perform better on housing and food access measures, but face lower outcomes related to broadband internet and health insurance and provider access.

## Enabler and impediment outcomes for U.S., GA, SC overall and Augusta Region counties

Enabler / Impediment	Metrics	U.S. Avg	GA Avg	Richmond	Columbia	Burke	McDuffie	Jefferson	Aiken	Edgefield	SC state
Built Environment	Homes with broadband internet access (2019-2023 avg) <sup>1</sup>	90%	89%	86%	91%	83%	75%	79%	90%	78%	87%
	Excessive housing cost burden (30%+ earnings spent on housing) (2019-2023 avg) <sup>2, 3</sup>	33%	31%	38%	23%	21%	28%	25%	23%	22%	28%
	Home ownership rate (2024, 2019-2023 avg for county data) <sup>2</sup>	66%	65%	53%	81%	74%	63%	68%	79%	82%	71%
Health and Well-Being	Food environment index (out of 10) (2019 & 2022 avg) <sup>1</sup>	7.4	6.3	5.9	8.5	7.6	8.5	8.3	7.8	7.4	6.5
	Drug overdose deaths (per 100K) (2020-2022) <sup>1</sup>	31	22	43	21	20	36	NA	50	37	39
	Mental health not good (in frequent mental distress) for >14 days (2022) <sup>1</sup>	16%	16%	20%	17%	20%	19%	21%	19%	19%	17%
	Share of population lacking health insurance (2023) <sup>4</sup>	8%	13%	14%	9%	13%	13%	17%	11%	14%	11%
	Teen birth rate (per 1000 females ages 15-19) (2017-2023) <sup>1</sup>	16	19	31	8	27	34	28	21	19	20
	Ratio of population to Primary Care Physician (2023) <sup>1</sup>	1,330:1	1,520:1	1,120:1	950:1	3,040:1	1,970:1	7,760:1	2,940:1	2,910:1	1,490:1

# Additional resources

This pre-read provides a brief overview of data to help provide context on the state of economic mobility in the Augusta region. You may find it helpful to dive deeper and explore additional publicly available data, data from your own organization, and data how outcomes vary over time and among different groups. Below are a few resources that you may find helpful as you explore.

Organization / Resource	Website
Augusta Economic Development Authority	<a href="https://augustaeda.org/site-selection/economic-overview/">https://augustaeda.org/site-selection/economic-overview/</a>
The Opportunity Atlas	<a href="https://www.opportunityatlas.org/">https://www.opportunityatlas.org/</a>
County Health Rankings and Roadmaps	<a href="https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/">https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/</a>
United for ALICE	<a href="https://www.unitedforalice.org/">https://www.unitedforalice.org/</a>
Brookings Metro Monitor 2025	<a href="https://www.brookings.edu/articles/metro-monitor-2025/">https://www.brookings.edu/articles/metro-monitor-2025/</a>