



Gary Commission on the
Social Status of Black Males

2024 Annual Report

3 August 2025

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Mission Statement

The mission of the Gary Commission on the Social Status of Black Males (GCSSBM) is to study the social conditions of the city's Black male population, develop strategies to remedy serious adversities, and make appropriate recommendations to improve the educational, social, economic, health, employment, and other circumstances for Gary. The Commission serves policymakers and public interest groups, as well as the media, community organizations and members of the public.

About Us

The Gary Commission on the Social Status of Black Males was established on May 20, 1998 (ordinance 6992) and reports to the Common Council of the City of Gary through the Clerk's Office. The Commission is committed to monitoring conditions impacting the physical, social, economic, and educational health of the community, with a specific interest in the state of affairs for Black males. In addition to the four categories previously mentioned, the commission remains in partnership with elected officials, community leaders, policy makers and the faith-based community to monitor criminal justice statistics and make recommendations to address pressing concerns related to the same. In this way, the Commission actively seeks opportunities to partner with and enhance existing programs in the community working to make a difference for Black males.

The commission meets monthly and is composed of nine (9) members who serve without compensation. The membership of the commission was revised on December 19, 2006, by ordinance 8023 (which amended ordinance 7055) and are appointed as follows: One (1) member appointed by the Mayor of the city of Gary, seven (7) members appointed by the Gary Common Council, and one (1) staff member appointed by the Chancellor of Ivy Tech Community College – Gary Campus.

Additional general information about the regulations, duties, structure, and membership of the commission can be found in Appendix A beginning on page 13 of this document.

While the commissioners serve without pay, the city of Gary Ordinance number 8023 calls for the Executive Director to receive a stipend of \$10,000.00 to be paid from the annual budget from the Gary Common Council. However, no funds have been provided for the executive director's stipend between December of 2019 and October of 2024, when he received \$2500.

The amended ordinance in 2016, asks the commission to prepare an annual report of its activities during the previous year and offer recommendations for the Common Council. This document represents the activities, observations, and recommendations from 2024.

Executive Summary

During the year 2023, the Gary Commission on the Social Status of Black Males continued its work serving as a hub of information to direct community members to resources and services to improve the quality of life for the citizens of Gary. The Executive Director regularly visited with justice involved individuals at the Lake County Community Corrections Work Release Center, NW Indiana Justice Coalition, representatives from Transforming Reentry Services, and corresponded with currently incarcerated citizens. Much of this work focused on reentry services helping individuals readjust to society after a period of incarceration. The Executive Director continued to host virtual bi-weekly re-entry circles to support individuals transitioning into society after incarceration through a virtual platform. This group continued to meet on a weekly, then bi-weekly basis throughout 2024.

There were several roster changes within the last year. Johnny Rucker was appointed as Mayor Melton's representative on the commission. Aaron King joined as the representative from the Gary Community School Corporation. Bruce Curry joined the commission as the representative of the NAACP. All these members were officially sworn in during before the end of the calendar year. Throughout the calendar year the commissioners met on first Wednesday of the month and engaged in its core mission of evaluating data to inform recommendations to improve conditions for citizens within this community. These recommendations will be grounded in data collected through engagement with citizens, committee research, and national databases from sources such as the U.S. Census, Bureau of Labor Statistics, and Indiana Commission on Higher Education among others. Recent data from these sources illustrate a variety of conditions exist which impact the social and economic realities for citizens within this community.

Recent data from the U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) and the Data Commons (DC) suggests the community continues to struggle with unemployment. For example, according to the BLS, the national unemployment rate was 4.1% for 2024.¹ For the City of Gary, the unemployment rate increased from 8.6% in January of 2024, to 9.2% in December of the same year.² Further, the 2023 data from the U.S. Census American Community Survey (ACS) reports a decline in the number of households from an estimated 31,207 households to 27,688 in the City of Gary. Of those, 8,819 (31%) of the households are female led with no spouse and 72.3% of those have people under 18 years of age in the home, a figure that is 9% higher than the state average from the same year.³ The same data set indicates only 22.6% of the households' reported homes with people under 18 years of age containing married or cohabitating couples. The breakdown of the traditional family structure may contribute to social and economic challenges for individuals living in a financially struggling community where it often takes two incomes for a family to survive.

Moreover, a comparison of the ACS data regarding education reveals a disturbing trend. The 2023 estimation tables indicate the population of males 24 years or younger *without* a high school diploma or GED is 22.3%. This represents an **11.3% increase** over the 2020 ACS tables and 5.8% higher than the state of Indiana.⁴ Additionally, the percentage of men 25 or older with a bachelor's degree decreased slightly by 0.1% to 7.1% compared to 18.2% for men in the entire state.⁵ Reduced educational attainment greatly impacts career opportunities. The 2023 ACS reveals 26.3% of the population over 16 works in the educational services, healthcare or social assistance fields. Other notable occupations include 5.6% in

¹ Bureau of Labor Statistics. Civilian Unemployment Rate, Seasonally Adjusted. Retrieved from <https://www.bls.gov/cps/>

² Data Commons. Gary-unemployment rate (US) June 2023. Retrieved May 9, 2024, from <https://datacommons.org/>

³ US Census. *American Community Survey: Households and families*. Retrieved May 9, 2025, from https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?t=Families%20and%20Living%20Arrangements%3AMarital%20Status%20and%20Marital%20History&g=0400000US18_1600000US1827000&tid=ACSS15Y2020.S1101

⁴ US Census. City of Gary: Educational attainment. Retrieved May 9, 2025, from <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2022.S1501?g=160XX00US1827000>

⁵ US Census. Indiana: Educational attainment. Retrieved May 9, 2025 from https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2022.S1501?t=Educational%20Attainment&g=040XX00US18_160XX00US1827000

construction, 10% in manufacturing, 13.8% in retail and 14% work in arts and entertainment. Eighty-one percent of the population are private wage and salaried employees, with 12% being government workers and 6% are self-employed. The median family income for the City of Gary was \$35,033 according to the 2023 estimates, down \$1,120 from the 2022 estimates.⁶ This data illustrates the persistent need to provide opportunities for appropriate job skills training to meet the evolving needs of industry within the region.

Finally, in alignment with national trends, Black males are adversely impacted by both crime within their communities and the disproportionate attention from law enforcement. Accordingly, the Commission, remains committed to exploring the data related to these conditions to make recommendations for policy and practices to address these concerns for the benefit of the city, state, and nation. In addition to exploring the data, the commission will continue to work to connect community members with the resources that promote their social, educational, and economic growth for the eventual benefit of all who reside within the city of Gary.

Financial Report 2024

The Gary Commission / Black Males functions without a budget. The Commission has a finance account that is managed by the Gary Economic Development Corp. The account balance was \$484.18 at the time of the preparation of this report. Recent developments have revealed the Gary Economic Development Corp is presently indicating they have no record of this account. Inquiries have been made by the GCSSBM Executive Director to discover what happened to those funds.

Subcommittee Reports

The GCSSBM currently has three subcommittees to carry out its work. Listed below is the general charge for each committee, the specific charge for each, and the current sub-committee members. *Note: the GCSSBM chairperson may create additional committees as needed.*

The general charge for the subcommittee is to develop and coordinate information and programs of public institutions, the private sector, associations, and individuals which address educational issues, poverty, violence, drug addiction, racism, debilitating health problems, under-education, under-employment, and other socio-economic factors impacting Black males.

In completing this work, the subcommittee's network with the African American Male Council, the Indiana Commission on the Social Status of Black Males and all local commissions and organizations working to identify and uplift the status of the Black male that are operating in the State of Indiana by sharing ideas, information, statistical data, and action plans.

Education & Awareness Sub-Committee:

- Chairman: Aaron King (Commissioner)
- Sub-committee Members: James Wallace (Commissioner); Janet Seabrook (Commissioner)

The purpose of the Education & Awareness Sub-Committee is to review conditions and make recommendations to improve educational access and achievement for Black males within the city of Gary. This includes identifying and disseminating information on resources for job trainings, continued

⁶ US Census. Median income in the past 12 months (in 2022 inflation adjusted dollars). Retrieved May 9, 2025, from <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2022.S1903?q=DP03&t=Income+and+Poverty&g=160XX00US1827000>

education, and financial aid resources. Annually, this committee shall compile data and report on student performance indicators including achievement, graduation, and dropout rates, comparing them to state and national averages.

Educational Narrative:

The educational landscape for Black males in Gary, Indiana is shaped by a complex web of social, economic, and familial challenges that create significant barriers to academic achievement. While students face these realities daily within the school system, the broader community must recognize and respond to these systemic issues with urgency and compassion.

A critical factor influencing the academic performance and overall well-being of our students is the household structure. More than 70% of the students in our public schools are being raised by single-mother households, often with multiple children. This condition places a heavy burden on the parent, who must simultaneously serve as caregiver, provider, and disciplinarian—often with limited support. Most of these parents do not possess a college degree, significantly limiting their access to stable, well-paying employment opportunities. As a result, many are forced to take third-shift factory jobs, working overnight hours that prevent them from being present during the most formative and essential parts of their child’s day.

This lack of parental availability has a cascading effect on students' educational experiences. Third-shift parents are often unable to get their children to school on time, which reduces classroom instructional time and hinders the establishment of consistent academic routines. More critically, these parents are not home after school to assist with homework, engage in academic enrichment activities, or prepare their children for the next day. Consequently, many students—particularly the youngest—are left to fend for themselves during these vital after-school hours. This level of independence is developmentally inappropriate for most children and often leads to disorganization, a lack of preparation, and emotional stress, which in turn manifest as behavioral issues and academic disengagement in the classroom.

The absence of consistent family structure also plays a direct role in the troubling rates of chronic absenteeism we are witnessing across the district. These missed days accumulate quickly and result in students falling behind in critical areas, most notably in reading and literacy. The recent changes to state educational policy—most significantly, the removal of the “No Child Left Behind” protections—have made third grade a high-stakes academic checkpoint. Students who do not pass the state-mandated literacy test are now eligible to be retained. For many of our students, this policy shift represents a harsh and demoralizing reality, particularly when they are already struggling due to factors beyond their control.

The classroom climate, as a result, is one often marked by low morale, high frustration, and a growing sense of helplessness. Students who are behind academically struggle to keep pace with their peers, and teachers are left to manage increasingly diverse and challenging learning gaps. The pressure on both students and educators is palpable. Despite the best efforts of our schools and administrators to address attendance issues and close learning gaps, our community simply does not have the resources required to comprehensively support these children and their families.

Recommendations

To move forward, we must invest in robust, wraparound solutions that address both the educational and socio-economic needs of our families. Parent education programs are a crucial starting point. These classes would provide guidance on how to build consistent routines, support homework completion, and establish home environments conducive to learning. Additionally, increased access to after-school literacy programs—particularly those tailored to struggling readers—would help combat the reading deficits that plague our classrooms. These initiatives must be culturally responsive, trauma-informed, and rooted in community collaboration to be effective.

The children of Gary, particularly Black males, are full of potential and resilience. But they cannot be expected to thrive in an educational system that fails to account for the realities of their lives outside the classroom. The Gary Commission on the Social Status of Black Males is committed to advocating for solutions that acknowledge these complexities and deliver targeted, sustainable change.

Economic Policy Sub-Committee:

- Chairman: Cordell Atkins (Commissioner)
- Sub-committee Members: Da'Ione Fields (Commissioner)
- Volunteer: Braden Wilson

Revised on May 4, 2022, the purpose of the Economic Policy Sub-Committee is to review the factors impacting the economic outcomes for the citizens of Gary Indiana for the purpose of making recommendations to improve those conditions. This includes reviewing policies and data concerning housing, community development, economic development, and employment. Additionally, this sub-committee will annually compile data and report on current conditions to inform the GCSSBM's annual report.

Employment and Income update:

As data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics reveal some communities are slower to recover from the adverse economic impact of the pandemics than others. Gary, Indiana is one such community. The unemployment rate increased from 8.6% in January 2024, to 9.2% by December of the same year.⁷ While this is significantly lower than the high of 19.3% at the height of the pandemic in April 2020, it is still higher than the rate of 4.4% reported for the entire state in December of 2024.⁸ Additionally, data from the Center for Workforce Innovation reveal 7.4% of the households within the state lack health insurance. A statistic which may deepen the financial crisis for a community already suffering from under-employment.

⁷ Bureau of Labor Statistics. Data Viewer, Unemployment rate: Gary, IN 2024. Retrieved July 10, 2025, <https://data.bls.gov/dataViewer/view>

⁸ Bureau of Labor Statistics. Local area unemployment statistics (2024). Retrieved July 10, 2025, from <https://data.bls.gov/pdg/SurveyOutputServlet>

Data from the U.S. Census 2023 ACS 1-Year Estimates indicates the proportion of families with related children under the age of 18 living below the poverty rate in the last 12 months decreased from 59.3% in 2022, to 48.7%, a more than 10.6% decrease.⁹ Coincidentally, the income earned for female householder's with no spouse has steadily increased for women with the median income deficit rising from \$27,118 in 2020, to \$17,092 according to the 2023 ACS 1-Year estimates.

The most recent year for data on occupations filled within the City of Gary, taken from the U.S. Census 2021 5-Year Estimation tables indicated 26.6% of the citizens work in service populations followed by 23.1% in management, 23.9% in sales or office work, with 20.6% in production and transportation and only 6% working in natural resources or construction.¹⁰ Additional data from the Center for Workforce Innovation reveal the top five projected areas for occupation demand for the City of Gary to be heavy & tractor trailer truck drivers, laborers & freight stock movers, retail sales persons, janitors & cleaners, and customer service representatives.¹¹

Recommendations:

As the data indicates the aftermath of the global pandemic, and ongoing economic concerns continue to have deleterious effects for families within the Gary community. While the numbers of families with children below the age of 18 living in poverty, the median incomes of the female led householder without a spouse living in the home still lagged over \$17,000 below the state average. Further, the job outlook reported by the Center for Workforce Innovations suggested the employment opportunities within the region would remain confined to time consuming and service-related positions with limited opportunity for upward mobility or child rearing exacerbating already challenging parenting responsibilities. Accordingly, it is the recommendation of this sub-committee to continue and expand the Guaranteed Income Pilot Program, invest in job training resources, and encourage more business investment to create employment opportunities for citizens within the city of Gary. A convening of stakeholders from the educational and business sectors is necessary to identify training platforms to better prepare low-income citizens for in-demand jobs within the city and state.

Therefore, it is the recommendation of the GCSSBM that the City of Gary continue to create conditions favorable to increasing the number of Black owned business within the community. Considering the state of many of the structures within the city another recommendation would be to promote involvement in the building and construction trades as it would encourage entrepreneurship and prepare the community to capitalize in the redevelopment that is sure to take place under the current administration.

⁹ US Census American Community Survey. Poverty status in the past 12 months. Retrieved July 10, 2025, from <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2022.S1701?t=Income%20and%20Poverty&g=160XX00US1827000>

¹⁰ US Census American Community Survey. Occupation by sex for the civilian employed population 16 years and over. Retrieved July 24, 2024, from <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2021.S2401?q=home%20ownership&t=Occupation&g=160XX00US1827000>

¹¹ Center for Workforce Innovations Employment report. Retrieved July 22, 2025, from https://indiana.sharepoint.com/:p/s/msteams_11a521/Ea63yOy0qUIIqGmQzYs-SagBTg889_eVO6zmPjLFfe75tw?e=bcxkBK

Community Engagement & Social Justice Sub-Committee

- Chairman: Da'loné Fields (Commissioner)
- Sub-Committee Members: Lt. Richard Allen (Commissioner); Beryl Fitzpatrick (Commissioner); Sis. Loretta Schleper

The charge of the Community Engagement & Social Justice Sub Committee was revised on May 4, 2022. Its purpose is to work with citizens, community-based organizations, and governmental entities to promote awareness of the variety of engagement opportunities that exist within the community. Further, this subcommittee is tasked with working with the community to create conditions to ensure due process is afforded to all citizens within the city, particularly for Black males who have been historically & comparatively overrepresented in the number of those involved with the justice system in America. This committee will compile data and monitor incarceration and crime statistics, collect and distribute information regarding community events and activities, and develop surveys to measure community engagement.

Community Engagement & Social Justice Sub-Committee Update:

Black males returning home from prison/jail in the city of Gary are underserved. While there are agencies that provide many of the services that a returning citizen would need, one essential service that is often overlooked is group support.

The GCSSBM executive director facilitated a weekly Reentry Circle for nearly eighteen (18) months between 2018 -2020. The Reentry Circle is a support group designed to assist formerly convicted people during their transition from incarceration to restorative citizenship. This experience brought to the forefront the culture of prison life. Because prison life is a cultural experience it is very important that a bridge be erected, and trust be developed between the prison inmate and support from the outside world prior to the inmate's release from prison. A Reentry Circle is a foundational stone for a returning citizen. I have been a brother to a brother whereas, I have developed rapport with inmates and contacted the Indiana Parole Board members, advocating for the inmates' parole as well as attending their parole hearings. These measures are called building bridges, a process that begins with corresponding with an inmate behind the prison walls which is a process that develops trust. I have recently contacted the Lake County Indiana prosecutor's office and advocated for a sentence modification for a man serving two (2) consecutive 50 year sentences at Indiana State Prison. He has served forty (40) years of his sentence. We are requesting a sentence modification and that he be transferred to Lake County Community Corrections Work Release Center to complete his sentence.

Recommendations:

As the reentry process is one often neglected in returning citizens back into the community the Community Engagement & Social Justice Committee the development of a support mechanism which provides the following support for individuals reentering society after a period of incarceration:

- Encourage community organizations to develop rapport' with inmates prior to their release from prison/jail via visits or letter writing.
- Teach inmates the principles of goal setting and the execution of their goals.
- Identify institutions of higher learning that will accept returning citizens.
- Social service agencies should develop relationships with local parole officers.

- Develop long term transitional housing facilities.
- The development of union jobs training programs that would include Black males from Gary.

These recommendations have been created through the countless conversation the Executive Director has had with participants of the reentry circles and from feedback from currently incarceration individuals who are looking to reclaim their lives and contribute value to their communities.

Appendix A

GCSSBM Membership, Regulations, & Structure

Advisory Council Officers and Members:

- Dr. Janet Seabrook – Community Health Net
- Dr. Aarick Jackson – Chancellor / IU Northwest
- Lieutenant Richard Allen – Gary Police Dept.
- Dr. Yvonne Stokes – Superintendent / Gary Community School Corporation
- Dr. Vanessa Allen-McCloud – President & C.E.O. Urban League of NWI
- No Representative – Ivy Tech Community College
- Steven Mays – President / NAACP; Gary Branch
- Johnny Rucker/ Gary Youth Services Bureau /Appointed by Mayor Eddie Melton
- Cordell Atkins – Center Manager / WorkOne, Portage Office
- Chief Derrick Cannon – Gary Police Department

Proxies:

- Dr. James Wallace for Chancellor Arrick Jackson (IUN)
- Bruce Curry for Steve Mays (NAACP)
- Da'Ione Fields for Dr. Vanessa Allen-McCloud (Urban League of NWI)
- Beryl Fitzpatrick for Dr. Janet Seabrook (CHN)
- Aaron King for Yvonne Stokes (GCSC)
- Richard Allen for Chief Cannon (GPD)

Regulations and Structure of the Commission:

All individuals appointed shall have an active interest in addressing the overall goals and purposes of the commission. Whenever any vacancies shall occur in any office, whether by death, resignation, or removal, the same shall be filled by GCSSBM as follows:

The chairperson will notify the appointing or designating authority when there is a vacancy. The appointing or designating authority shall fill the vacancy by appointing a new member for the unexpired term.

An Advisory Council member may resign at any time by filing his / her written resignation with the chairperson. A member shall serve at the pleasure of the appointing or designating authority and may

be removed at any time by the appointing or designating authority, provided that any member appointed by virtue of his or her office as president or director or other office as herein stated, may be removed at any

time, after public hearing, for any cause.

Executive Committee

The Executive Committee will consist of the Chairperson, the Vice Chairperson, and the Secretary of the Commission. The Executive Committee shall meet on the call of the chairperson and shall report all business to the Commission members prior to the next scheduled Commission meeting.

Executive Director

An Executive Director shall be selected by the Common Council and shall be reasonably compensated by the annual budget of the Common Council in the amount of \$10,000. Additionally, the Executive Director shall prepare a calendar for the commission for the upcoming year denoting meeting dates, events, and focus area initiatives. The calendar will be provided to Advisory Council members and designees no later than November 30th of each year.

The Executive Director shall prepare a draft schedule for the preparation of the annual report. The annual report will be submitted each year by May 31st, (in accordance with IC 5-14-6).

Per Diem

The Executive Director, Chairperson, and Vice Chairperson of the GCSSBM shall receive a per diem for any authorized expenses for travel, meals or lodging incurred in connection with the annual conference of the Social Status of Black Males in Indianapolis, IN. Upon prior approval by the council, advisory council members shall be reimbursed for expenses incurred on behalf of the commission, (in accordance with ordinance 8023).

Powers and Duties

Advisory Council members will be expected to attend all meetings and serve on one or more of its committees.

Member attending meetings by electronic communication shall be considered present, shall be counted for the purpose of quorum, and may vote at a meeting if:

- At least five (5) members are physically present; and
- The meeting adheres to all other requirements of the Open-Door law.
- All votes are done so via roll call.
- Each member must physically attend at least four (4) meetings per calendar year.
- A conference call-in line or virtual video link will be made available by the executive committee to all members at least forty-eight (48) hours in advance of any meetings.

Subcommittees, Ad hoc committees

Advisory council members will carry out duties as specified in the enabling ordinance, including but not limited to:

- The chairperson may designate subcommittees or ad hoc committees to meet as necessary and report back to the full commission.
- The subcommittee or ad hoc committee shall be chaired by a member of the Commission, appointed by the Commission's Chairperson.
- The subcommittee or ad hoc committee Chair may seek advice or counsel from resource individuals who are non-commissioned members. There shall be a minimum of one (1) Advisory Council member on each subcommittee.

End of Report

