

# Making Democracy Work:

Real Solutions for Recruiting and Retaining  
Public Employees





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## **Our Mission**

The **AFT** is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

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# Executive Summary

Our democracy is challenged when governments at all levels cannot hire sufficient staff to advance the charge and continuity of our democratic system. Our union, the largest union in the AFL-CIO representing predominantly public employees, is committed to the success of our U.S. system of government. This report is the third of its kind from the AFT. In July 2022, we released the AFT Teacher and School Staff Shortage Task Force report “[Here Today, Gone Tomorrow?](https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/media/2022/taskforcereport0722.pdf)” (https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/media/2022/taskforcereport0722.pdf). In November 2022, we released the “[AFT Healthcare Staffing Shortage Task Force Report](https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/2022/hc_StaffingTaskforceReport_Nov2022.pdf)” (https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/2022/hc\_StaffingTaskforceReport\_Nov2022.pdf), launching our Code Red campaign. Our latest report is the result of a yearlong study of the crisis of staff shortages within the local, state and federal government workforces. The AFT recognizes that to maintain adequate staffing levels, government employers must become “destination employers” and attract high-quality candidates who are interested in working for the common good of our country.

## Recommendations

All of our recommendations point to recognition that the pandemic, the “great resignation” that ensued, and the continued national shortage of workers have led to changing demands from employees. By responding to the needs of the total employee, we build a more loyal and resilient workforce committed to the mission of our democracy. A well-rounded, comprehensive wage-and-benefits package that is focused on wellness gives potential employees a clear choice between working in the private sector and the public sector. We recognize the balance that workers seek as well as provide an opportunity for paid service to our nation. We recommend:

1. Returning to a 35-hour workweek to support a balanced life.
2. Providing workplace flexibility: Jobs should be evaluated for remote work and hybrid work (in-person and work-from-home options).
3. Increasing public sector salaries to reduce the pay gap between private sector professionals and public sector professionals.
4. Creating benefit options to support employees wherever they are in their life cycle, including opportunities to access child care subsidies, housing support, subsidized commuting costs, investment and estate planning, or student debt relief.
5. Including mental health supports in the public sector healthcare coverage and having expanded treatment options for staff who experience on-the-job trauma and are at risk for moral injury.
6. Supporting and strengthening traditional defined-benefit pensions to attract and retain employees who are significantly behind in retirement savings.
7. Supporting a variety of opportunities for workers to become familiar with what the public sector provides, including internships, apprenticeships, fellowships, “service years,” mentoring programs and training opportunities.
8. Investing in human resources professionals to help guide recruitment and retention efforts throughout the public sector.
9. Improving the timeline for hiring staff.
10. Updating all job descriptions regularly to reflect the critical skills and education necessary to succeed in the job.





## Introduction

Citizens with mental health challenges are not getting the care they need in Colorado where the state facilities do not have the nursing staff to support their medical needs. They are housed in prisons with no care, awaiting beds in state mental health facilities.<sup>1</sup> Municipalities across the country have had their credit ratings eroded because they do not have enough auditors and accountants to file the necessary financial reporting documents.<sup>2</sup> Children in our juvenile justice programs are confined to their rooms with few extracurricular activities when the local public agency has 55 vacant positions.<sup>3</sup> Payroll is not processed in Alaska state government when 45 percent of the clerk positions are vacant.<sup>4</sup> Every day, our democracy is challenged when our government cannot recruit and retain the necessary staff to ensure the laws and regulations passed during our 250-year history are practiced. Our country is at a tipping point, and our democracy is at risk.

AFT public employees are proud of the work they provide caring for our country. They ensure the laws that guide us and regulate our society function. Without a fully staffed public sector, public services may be compromised or inadequate, causing our constituents to lose faith in government itself. This undermines our democracy and threatens our nation's ability to meet the needs of its citizens. Our commitment to public service is not enough to recruit and retain top talent to the public sector. Public employees are not volunteers. Our union is committed to our members' work and the mission of our workforce. We must be partners in ensuring that our union contracts and our employers are providing well-rounded careers for the workforce of the future.

Public employee members in the AFT are under a lot of stress—the pandemic, a worker shortage and a lack of resources have hindered our ability to provide services. For decades, it was understood that public employees often earned less in salary but had better benefits and retirement packages to round out their total compensation. This is not the case today. Around the country, our union members struggle with low pay for their professions, retirement plans that are dramatically cut or even eliminated, and health insurance coverage that is expensive or lacking. Today, the private sector offers competitive benefits and compensation packages that the public sector isn't matching. Public workers provide critical services to ensure our society functions while dealing with fewer staff and a challenging outlook for the future. Additionally, our strong public sector has supported and strengthened a diverse middle class in the United States.

Government employers must transform to become “destination employers,” where residents seek out public employment because of the strong, balanced culture providing purpose-driven careers. We want workers to be attracted to careers in public service as a transformative commitment to our country, where workers can lead balanced lives providing common good services to our residents. This task force has spent a year researching and discussing ideas and recommendations our affiliates might consider in their bargaining and policy work to make the public sector an employer of choice, a destination employer. It is clear that labor and management must change hiring and employment practices if we are to attract a new generation of workers to the public sector.

# Critical number of vacancies affect our work

When the 2020 global pandemic hit the U.S., state and local government employment numbers had just fully recovered from the 2008 recession. Today, nationwide, there are close to 970,000 vacant state and local government positions.<sup>5</sup> Each of those jobs is critical to our democracy, and we have not succeeded in filling these positions. Positions remain vacant due to a lack of candidates. Additionally, in the federal government, the largest employer in the U.S., 30 percent of the workforce is eligible to retire in the next five years.<sup>6</sup> All AFT affiliates are wrestling with the effects of short staffing in the workforce. For example, in Kansas, corrections officers have worked mandatory double shifts for months on end. And in New York, the Office of Children and Family Services State Central Register implemented a mandatory overtime policy when they were short 55 staff members and could not cover the child abuse hotline. The inability to fully staff essential positions is impacting the public sector across our nation and in our territories. Employees are exhausted and frustrated.

The public sector is competing in a very tight labor market. According to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, there are currently 9.8 million job vacancies with approximately 5.9 million unemployed workers.<sup>7</sup> The federal unemployment rate hovers around 3.6 percent.

This situation is exacerbated by the fact that government workers are a highly educated workforce. The majority of work in federal, state and local governments is done by knowledge workers. In May 2020, entry-level jobs requiring a postsecondary education comprised over 63 percent of state government jobs and 61 percent of local government jobs, compared with 35 percent of private sector employment.<sup>8</sup> This further narrows the applicant pool. If we are to succeed in protecting the common good and supporting our democracy, unions must be part of the solution to attract and retain our workforce.

## Finding ‘hidden workers’

In a report titled “Hidden Workers: Untapped Talent,”<sup>9</sup> released in September 2021, the Harvard Business School identified a growing group of people who are unemployed or underemployed, not currently counted in our unemployment numbers and eager to get a job or increase their working hours. Harvard dubbed these workers the “hidden workforce.” By its estimate, there are 27 million workers who make up the hidden workforce:

“Ultimately, we found that hidden workers fall into three broad categories: **missing hours** (working one or more part-time jobs but willing and able to work fulltime); **missing from work** (unemployed for a long time but seeking employment); or **missing from the workforce** (not working and not seeking employment but willing and able to work under the right circumstances).”

In addition to the 5.9 million unemployed workers counted in the labor statistics, these 27 million workers could be recruited to the public sector and build a purpose-driven career of service to the public. Studies show that, once hired, hidden workers make loyal employees who are committed to the public mission. We believe that government employers must offer an employment package to target this workforce and bring them into service.







## A diverse workforce

To effectively carry out the mission of the public sector, our federal, state and local government workforces must resemble our population in its diversity. Equitable service to constituents can only be provided when we have a diverse staff with diverse viewpoints and experiences. The public sector has long been more diverse and representative than the private sector.

Roughly 1 in 5 Black workers are employed in public sector jobs.<sup>10</sup> In 2019, 48 percent of all Black women and 21 percent of all Black men were employed in education, health services or public administration, the primary industries of state and local governments.<sup>11</sup> In 2021, 16 percent of employed Black women and 10 percent of employed Black men worked for state and local governments. The proportion of American Indian and Alaska Native individuals working in state and local governments is similar: Eighteen percent of employed American Indian and Alaska Native women and 10 percent of employed American Indian and Alaska Native men work for state and local governments.<sup>12, 13</sup>

Women account for most workers in state and local governments, representing 60.3 percent of the labor force in 2021. In the federal government, women held 44.5 percent of

jobs. In the same year, 15 percent of all employed women worked for state and local governments, compared with 9 percent of all employed men.<sup>14</sup>

Starting in January 2023, the Biden administration directed federal agencies to begin collecting sexual orientation and gender identity data in census surveys and federal forms,<sup>15</sup> However, this data had yet to be released at the time of our publication. Reliable data for nonbinary workers in either the public or private sector has yet to be collected on a national scale.

As public sector union leaders and activists, we believe that labor and management together can influence change for a stronger public service. If we are to strengthen government service and advance our democracy, there must be necessary adjustments in how we support public careers. Union leaders can bargain support for purposeful careers with the balance and benefits that workers are seeking in a post-pandemic environment.

# AFT Recommendations

When our task force worked to define what it means to be a destination employer, we realized that all of our recommendations coalesced into a concept of holistic employment. Recognizing the total needs of an employee leads to working conditions that are fair, equitable and competitive. By providing competitive wages, strong benefits, and reasonable workloads, we take care of the basic needs

of workers. By investing in professional development, speeding up the hiring process and regularly reviewing job descriptions, we ease entry into the workforce and support employees throughout the course of their careers. We believe that investment in employees fosters better retention rates and higher productivity. Our recommendations stem from this principle.

## 1. Return to a 35-hour work week to support a balanced life.

The COVID-19 pandemic changed workers' relationship to their jobs. In 2022, more workers in the United Kingdom said they were attracted to their current role for the work-life balance (41 percent) than the salary (36 percent). This is a shift from 2019 data, when salary (41.02 percent) outranked work-life balance (40.97 percent).<sup>16</sup> A survey of 31,000 people in 31 countries found that 53 percent of employees are more likely to prioritize health and well-being over work than before the pandemic.<sup>17</sup>

The post-pandemic worker wants better work-life balance (51 percent), better flexibility in day-to-day work (49 percent), better compensation (49 percent) and increased focus on employee well-being (47 percent).<sup>18</sup> A full 70 percent of workers demand purposeful work.<sup>19</sup>

Historically, the public sector moved from a 35-hour workweek to a 40-hour workweek in the early 1990s. Especially after the pandemic, job seekers and workers desire a return to balance and connection. This can be done by offering workers more control over their work-life balance and reduced hours on the job. Technology has increased productivity and allowed us to consider changes to the 40-hour work week, with no loss of productivity. This reduction in work hours must not result in a loss of pay, so hourly wages should be recalculated to reflect that 35 hours make up a full workweek. For example, a county corrections officer who was paid \$20 per hour in a 40-hour work week would receive \$1,600 in gross wages in a biweekly paycheck. To maintain the same

level of compensation with a reduced workload, that officer should be paid at least \$22.86 per hour to earn a few cents more than the same pay she earned during a 40-hour workweek. This adjustment would make a large difference in an employee's quality of life while making a minimal impact on payroll, after the initial transition.

For 24-hour facilities, a reduction in an hourly employee's work may or may not apply. Many hospitals already staff nurses in three 12-hour shifts per week as full-time employees. For recommendations on improving the staffing crisis in healthcare, please see our sister report, the AFT Healthcare Staffing Shortage Task Force Report.



## 2. Jobs should be evaluated for remote work and hybrid in-person and work from home options.

Prior to March 2020, teleworking was an optional benefit available to only a few, typically highly paid employees. Only 4 percent of state and government workers had access to telework prior to the pandemic.<sup>20</sup> In April 2020, nearly 69 percent of the workforce worked from home, with 90 percent of federal employees teleworking at some point during the pandemic. Remote work options proved popular with employees, and several studies showed that remote employees work longer hours and are more productive at home. In government service however, there are many jobs that are not able to be done remotely.

Widespread remote work and a tight labor market are credited with the highest rate of employment of people with disabilities in more than a decade. The pandemic-driven preference for remote work particularly benefited people with mobility-related disabilities. Research supports the continued use of remote work to promote employment of disabled individuals.

A federal study of the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) found that between June and October 2022, job-

opportunity announcements with remote work options had 17 times more applications than non-remote jobs and expanded the pool of potential candidates. Military spouses, women and non-white applicants were much more likely to apply for remote jobs, and candidates from more states applied for remote jobs than non-remote jobs. A 2023 study reported that 45 percent of government employees say they would consider finding a new job if their agency reduced remote and hybrid work flexibility.

We know that not all public sector jobs can be performed remotely. Care for patients and inmates, infrastructure improvements and policing are some of the public services that require in-person work. However, when telework can be implemented, it can lead to higher productivity, a higher-quality of life for employees, and improved recruitment and retention. We suggest that public positions be evaluated for hybrid remote work options, when initiated by employees and union leaders. When people are in positions where are not able to work remotely, unions might consider alternative compensation packages.



Source: McKinsey and Company, Reimagine Work: Employee Survey January 2021

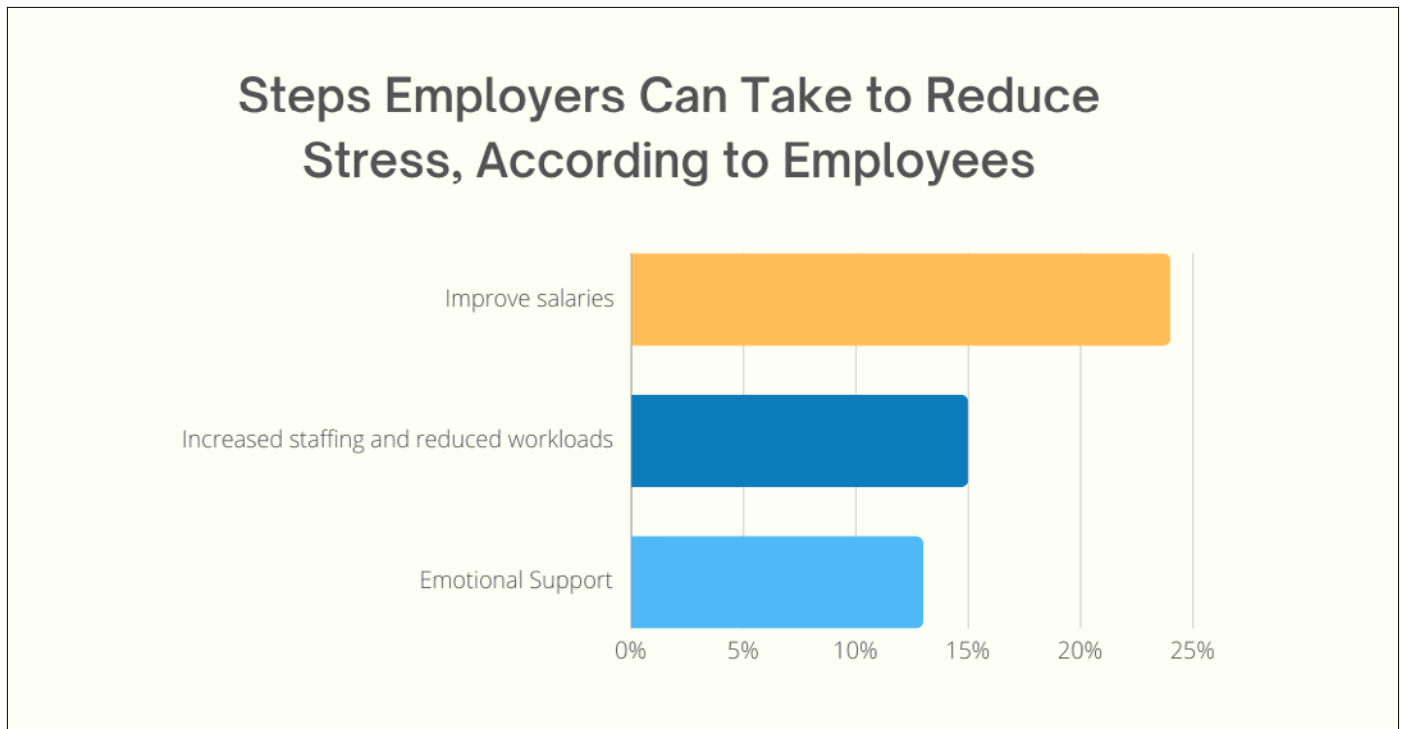


### 3. Increase public sector salaries to reduce the pay gap between private sector professionals and public sector professionals.

The crux of the recruitment and retention challenge in government service comes squarely down to the often extreme difference in salary between the private and the public sector. Where there is a competition for talent between the two sectors, there is no arguing that the private sector attracts candidates who look strictly at salary. Our mission-related work in the public sector accounts for some professionals looking first to the public sector. However, without a doubt, salary alone will never be the sole reason that someone comes to work in the public sector. Public sector salaries are typically limited by perceived taxpayer opinion: Most taxpayers are generally not willing to increase their taxes to pay the competitive salaries necessary to recruit staff, who often have years of experience,

student loan debt from advanced degrees, and many private sector offers. To recruit and retain public sector workers, we must strengthen our well-rounded approach to public work and offer competitive compensation where salary is just one piece of the package. When that isn't done, the public sector must look to other compensation alternatives to remain in the running for candidates.

In addition to nearly a quarter (24 percent) of public sector employees saying that the top actionable step employers can take to reduce stress is to improve salaries; 15 percent of the workforce calls for increased staffing and reduced workloads, and 13 percent advocates for emotional support.



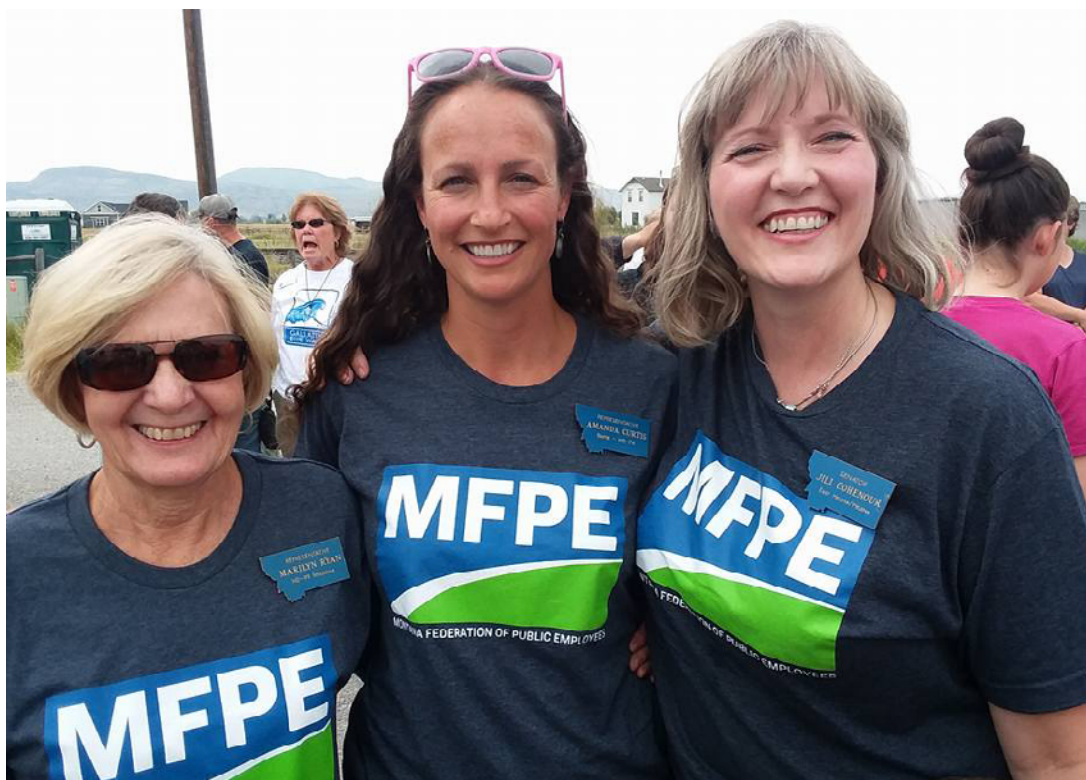
Source: MissionSquare Research Institute: Public Sector Employee Views on Finance and Employment due to COVID-19

#### 4. Create benefit options to support employees wherever they are in their life cycle, including opportunities to access child care subsidies, housing support, subsidized commuting costs, investment and estate planning, or student debt relief.

Although the public sector may not be able to compete with the private sector on wages and salaries, governments can become destination employers by using a broad range of benefits to concentrate on the whole person who comes to work every day. The public sector works for the common good and historically has provided well-rounded benefit packages to supplement the less competitive salaries, compared with the private sector. Government employee benefit packages should address, and be inclusive of, connecting with the whole-person approach. For example, a librarian may also be a new father, a park ranger may have a congenital condition in need of care, a state lab chemist may have student loan debt. These employees' benefit packages should ensure that the worker can focus their working energy on their jobs, secure in the knowledge that they can access treatment, paid time off and/or financial assis-

tance when they need it. Comprehensive benefits sustain a workforce, both attracting new workers and helping to retain long-term employees.

The *Harvard Business Review* reports that “caregiving leave, retirement savings programs, financial check-ups and lifelong learning and reskilling are attractive to all employees, regardless of age.” The public sector can creatively provide opportunities to support these types of benefits by offering a range of benefit choices for employees. This benefit choice structure would support those who don’t necessarily need one type of subsidy or another. Someone without student loans may need assistance with commuter costs and retirement planning. An employee may need housing support but not child care subsidies. By offering an a la carte benefit structure, public sector employers will help support the hidden workforce and help retain current staff.



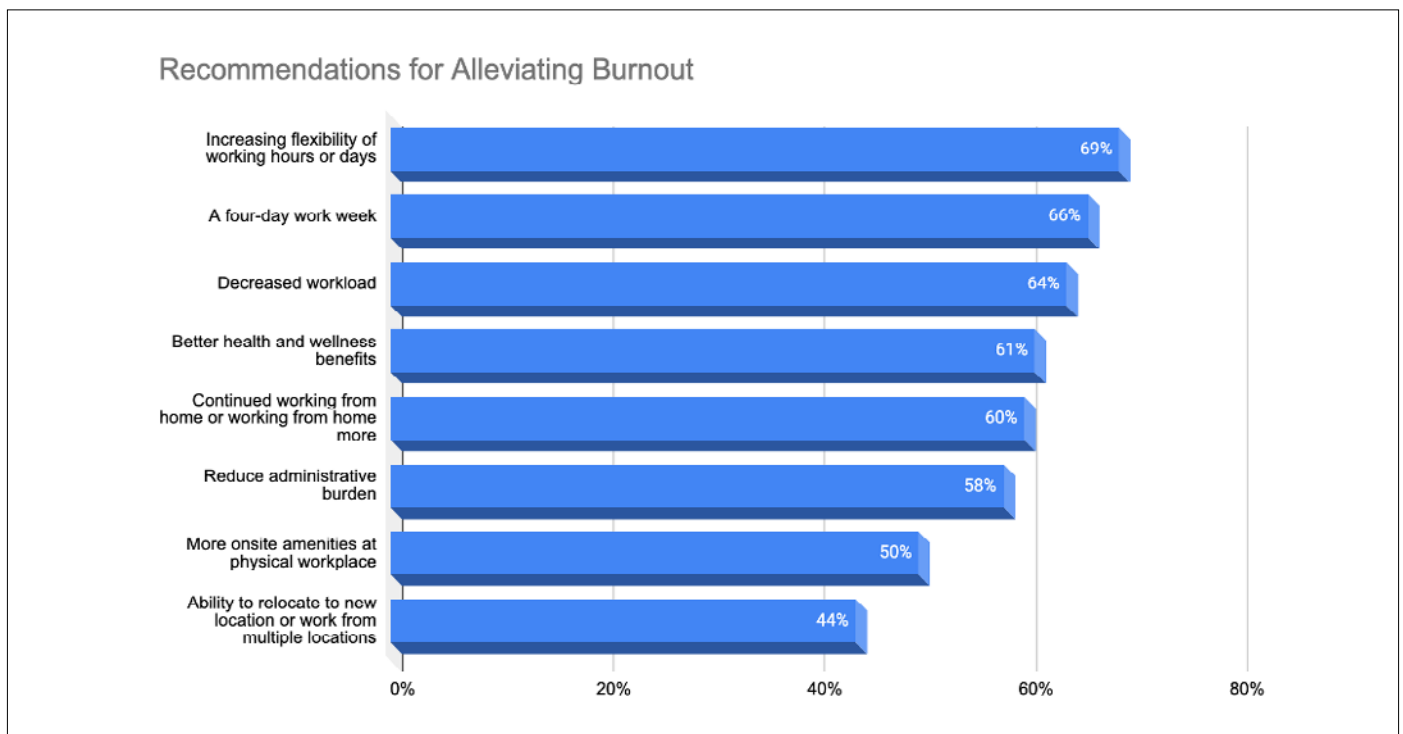
## 5. Include mental health supports in the public sector healthcare coverage and have expanded treatment options for staff who experience on-the-job trauma and are at risk for moral injury claims.

Burnout in public service is at an all-time high. In a March 2023 report, Eagle Hill Consulting found that the government workforce (52 percent) has higher rates of burnout than the private workforce (45 percent), which is an improvement over the previous year, when 65 percent of government workers and 44 percent of private sector workers reported burnout. Women government workers (59 percent) were substantially more likely to report burnout than their male colleagues (46 percent). The survey showed that the top causes of burnout for government workers were workload (49 percent), staff shortages (43 percent), lack of communication and support (43 percent), work-life balance (42 percent) and time pressures (31 percent).

The top recommendations for alleviating burnout were increasing flexibility of working hours or days (69 percent), a four-day workweek (66 percent), decreased workload (64 percent), better health and wellness benefits (61 percent),

a continuation of work from home or working from home more (60 percent), reduced administrative burdens (58 percent), more on-site amenities at the on-site workplace (50 percent) and ability to relocate to a new location or work from multiple locations (44 percent).

In June 2021, 74 percent of all workers reported experiencing at least occasional burnout at work. The stakes of burnout are high: “Employees who say they are burned out very often or always are 23 percent more likely to visit the emergency room,” according to Gallup. Burnout isn’t just a problem for the employee; it also affects an organization’s bottom line. On average, an organization will spend 15 to 20 percent of its total payroll on voluntary turnover costs due to burnout. Employees who are burned out take more sick days, have lower confidence in their job performance and are more likely to seek another job.



Source: Eagle Hill Consulting: Understanding Government Employee Burnout



In a 2022 survey, 13 percent of government or public policy workers answered that their job had an extremely negative impact on their mental health over the prior six months, which was higher than in any other industry. Considering the high stress of public-facing jobs and many jobs within the public sector, government employees should have employer-provided access to independent mental health

services, with low or no premiums for the employees. Employee assistance programs should provide resources that the employees can choose for themselves, to maintain confidentiality and comprehensive access to mental healthcare. This is one key step to combat burnout and improve retention in the workforce.

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## 6. Support and strengthen traditional defined-benefit pension plans to attract and retain employees who are significantly behind in retirement savings.

Defined-benefit pension plans have long been a feature of public sector benefits packages, and for good reason: They are a powerful retention tool, and pensions have a strong multiplier effect on the broader economy. Research from the National Institute on Retirement Security finds that a DB plan has a 49 percent cost advantage compared with an individually managed defined-contribution plan. Additionally, a DB plan is 27 percent less expensive than the “ideal” DC plan due to low fees and no individual investor deficiencies. NIRS also estimates that each taxpayer dollar invested in state and local government pensions supports \$7.89 in total output nationally.

Not only do pensions boost the economy, they also impact worker retention. An April 2023 study found that when Alaska closed its defined-benefit pension plans for public employees and transitioned to 401(k)-style defined-contribution plans, more public employees and educators left their positions. This report builds on research from NIRS’ 2019 case study of four states—Alaska, Kentucky, Michigan and West Virginia— that closed their pension plans in favor of an alternative plan design. The case study found that despite the promise of addressing existing pension plan underfunding through closing defined-benefits plans, costs for taxpayers increased. NIRS found that the change in plan design resulted in greater retirement insecurity for employees, which led West Virginia to reopen its closed pension plan in 2005, after 14 years of unsuccessfully implementing defined-contribution plans.

Mid-career employees and those close to retirement keenly understand the importance of retirement savings, although many Americans find themselves unprepared. In “The Forgotten Generation,” a study released in July 2023, NIRS found a challenging retirement outlook for workers in Generation X (born 1965-1980). This is the first generation to enter the labor market following the shift from defined-benefit plans to 401(k) contribution accounts.

Author Tyler Bond states:

*“A big part of the problem is that far too many Gen Xers don’t have access to a retirement plan through their employer. Only 14 percent of Gen Xers have a pension plan, and only about half are participating in a retirement plan at their job. As a result, a large share of Generation X has virtually nothing saved for retirement, and most who are saving are not close to savings targets that will enable them to retire with their current standard of living.”*

According to research from the Pew Charitable Trusts, over the next two decades, states will face an estimated \$334.3 billion in aggregate increased spending because of citizens’ insufficient retirement savings. This strains budgets for state salaries and benefits, including meeting sufficient funding levels for defined-benefit pension obligations. Employers that offer robust, fully funded pension plans have a strong advantage in recruiting workers who understand that they are behind in their retirement savings. Additionally, defined-benefit plans help retain employees for the long run.



## 7. Support a variety of opportunities for workers to become familiar with what the public sector provides, including internships, apprenticeships, fellowships, “service years,” mentoring programs and training opportunities.

There are different ways to build a pipeline of workers to support the mission of the public sector. Maryland has become the first state to develop a service year opportunity for young people. Indiana successfully supports and trains state workers through its internship programs, offers career advancement training opportunities in the technical field and developed a seasonal opportunity for high school graduates. Colorado increased its commitment to the expansion of an apprenticeship program in state government specifically to focus on hard-to-staff positions and to support recruitment and retention efforts.

Fellowships have been used specifically to recruit for science and technology positions in recent years. The Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University designed the Eagleton Science and Politics Program to place scientists into policy positions as fellows within state agencies and

the legislature. This fellowship encourages Ph.D. candidates, postdocs, and faculty to consider long-term careers in public service and has been extremely successful.

A number of state governments, including Connecticut and Maryland, have found success working with the Second Chance Initiative to provide training and opportunities for individuals recently released from prison. Although those who are returning to communities have complex needs in finding employment, public agencies have found success in matching the needs of the formerly incarcerated with vacant positions in government service. This can be a win-win to reduce recidivism and support former inmates.

We recommend government employers, that are serious about attracting and retaining worker talent, create and support different types of on-ramps to introduce prospective employees to the mission-driven work of the public agency.

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## 8. Invest in human resources professionals to help guide recruitment and retention efforts throughout the public sector.

In the past few decades, government human resource professionals have been replaced by online tools, apps and automated employment practices. Automated hiring tools (such as Indeed), resume sorting, onboarding and automated evaluations provide opportunities for hidden bias through machine learning and artificial intelligence throughout public employment practices.

To hire and support a variety of candidates, and to capture the talents of hidden workers, the public sector must commit to supporting its workforce with a human touch. If automated resume filtering systems are used, the public sector needs to shift from “negative” to “positive” filters for resumes. In other words, applicants will be included in the

candidate search on the basis of skills and demonstrated credentials, not just continued employment or a college degree in a particular field. Too many candidates are filtered out of the hiring field through automated tools.

We recommend that human resources departments recommit to employing an appropriate number of staff to manage recruitment, attend job fairs, interact with and support the workforce. If a public employee has a question for human resource professionals pertaining to their employment, perhaps about their health insurance benefits, or planning their career ladder or sorting out leave, they must have other options than an automated system to interact with.

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## 9. Improve the timeline for hiring staff.

Even with the most complex jobs, the timeline from posting to hire letter should be no more than 45 days unless there are critical background and security checks that need to be undertaken. The current hiring process for public positions is notoriously slow; one federal agency suggests candidates prepare for a three- to five-month process. By modernizing application systems and streamlining the process, governments can reduce the timeline between posting and filling

positions. Missouri reduced its hiring timeline from 65 days in 2020 to 58 days the following year by sharing best practices across agencies, like scheduling interviews while job announcements are still open. But that is not short enough in a tight employment market.

The application process for public jobs should be designed to funnel as many candidates into the process as possible. Job postings should be shared widely and should be easy to find on agency websites. Eliminating redundancies in applications, such as requiring a prospective employee to either fill out an application with detailed job history or include a resume, but not requiring both, can boost applications. Making paper applications available at public facilities, like libraries, community centers and post offices will increase the pool of potential applicants to include individuals who may have limited digital access. Websites with job postings and applications should be optimized for applicants with disabilities. Finally, clear and consistent communication with applicants throughout the hiring process will help to retain applicants if hiring takes longer than expected.





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## 10. Update all job descriptions regularly to reflect the critical skills and education necessary to succeed in the job.

Too often in the public sector, job descriptions are not reviewed for accuracy or updated to provide a better reflection of the scope of work and the tie to our democracy. At regular intervals, updates must be done through an objective process that includes all workers currently in the positions to focus with specificity and clarity on the skills needed to succeed in the job. These evaluations must include workers currently in the position, what the job entails in other public sectors as well as any comparison to the private sector.

Technological change affects most public jobs, and the job descriptions used in recruitment must reflect what is actually happening on the job. Given the higher level of education needed for most public work, it's crucial that realistic expectations are included in job descriptions and job postings. Each job description should include the mission of the agency and the direct tie to our democracy.

Additionally, updating job descriptions will allow human resources professionals and union leaders to review the compensation level attributed to the position to ensure that it is competitive for the skills needed. Each time a job description is reviewed, a compensation review for accuracy in grade should also be done.



# Conclusion

The AFT and our affiliates continuously strive to improve our workplaces and provide high-quality service to the people our members serve. We do this through collective bargaining, policy engagement and on-the-job advocacy. Using many tactics, union members have tried to engage our employers to improve the public sector's ability to recruit and retain staff using the means within our control. It is clear that without intentional change in public sector compensation, benefits and working conditions, our country is at risk of not having enough staff to support our democracy. Our justice efforts, family support, environmental stewardship and protection, and so much more crucial work will not be done. We encourage all AFT affiliates to work with their management counterparts to address the staffing crisis and protect our democratic system.

## Endnotes

- 1 <https://coloradosun.com/2023/07/06/state-mental-hospitals-nursing-shortage-jail/>
- 2 <https://www.governing.com/finance/hey-budding-accountants-governments-need-you>
- 3 <https://wamu.org/story/23/07/24/confinement-at-dc-youth-jail-has-parents-worried/>
- 4 <https://alaskabeacon.com/2023/08/22/alaska-state-payroll-department-one-crisis-away-from-workers-going-unpaid/>
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- 6 [https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/ap\\_7\\_strengthening\\_fy2023.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/ap_7_strengthening_fy2023.pdf)
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- 9 <https://www.hbs.edu/managing-the-future-of-work/Documents/research/hiddenworkers09032021.pdf>
- 10 <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/public-work-provides-economic-security-black-families-communities/>
- 11 [https://www.epi.org/blog/cuts-to-the-state-and-local-public-sector-will-disproportionately-harm-women-and-black-workers/#\\_ref1](https://www.epi.org/blog/cuts-to-the-state-and-local-public-sector-will-disproportionately-harm-women-and-black-workers/#_ref1)
- 12 <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/investments-in-the-state-and-local-government-workforce-will-deliver-crucial-services-and-create-economic-security/>
- 13 Note on language: The source cited used two controversial terms to refer to Indigenous peoples who live in Alaska. The people referred to here may be more accurately referred to as Unangan, Inuit, Inupiaq and Yupik. We have chosen the term “Alaska Native” to collectively represent these groups and additional Indigenous peoples who may have been included in the original research, in keeping with Inupiaq and Yupik. We have chosen the term “Alaska Native” to collectively represent these groups and additional Indigenous peoples who may have been included in the original research, in keeping with guidance from the Bureau of Indian Affairs: <https://www.bia.gov/faqs/why-are-american-indians-and-alaska-natives-also-referred-native-americans>.
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