

State and Local Employment in New York, Cut in the Pandemic, Has Been Down for a Decade

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STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT EMPLOYMENT IS VITAL TO OUR ECONOMY AND OUR QUALITY OF LIFE.

State and local governments—and their employees—exist because New Yorkers have decided over generations that we need people who are dedicated and trained to teach our children, clean our streets, protect our communities, maintain our highways and bridges, and perform hundreds of other jobs.

The number of public employees in New York fell substantially during the pandemic, by an annual average of over 55,000 from 2019 to 2020. Some of this may have been early retirement by workers—teachers, for example—whose jobs put them in Covid danger; some may have been layoffs because of lower public needs when fewer people were out and about; some may have been cutbacks in response to lower local tax collections.

Now that we know that it looks like New York State will be in better fiscal shape for the next few years, we can expect that the state, counties, municipalities, and school districts will begin filling the personnel gaps left by the Pandemic.

But replacing those 55,000 workers is not enough. While the state population in 2020 was about the same as it was in 2010 (after rising until 2017 and then falling), the number of state and local employees in 2020 was about 57,000 lower than a decade earlier. We suggest that the best way to evaluate the minimum number of public employees needed is to think of the number of people they need to serve; if there are fewer state and local workers relative to the population, services of all kinds will be weaker. Figure one shows the history of this measure from 2010 through 2020.

The Number of State and Local Employees per Thousand Residents Has Been Below its 2010 Level for a Decade

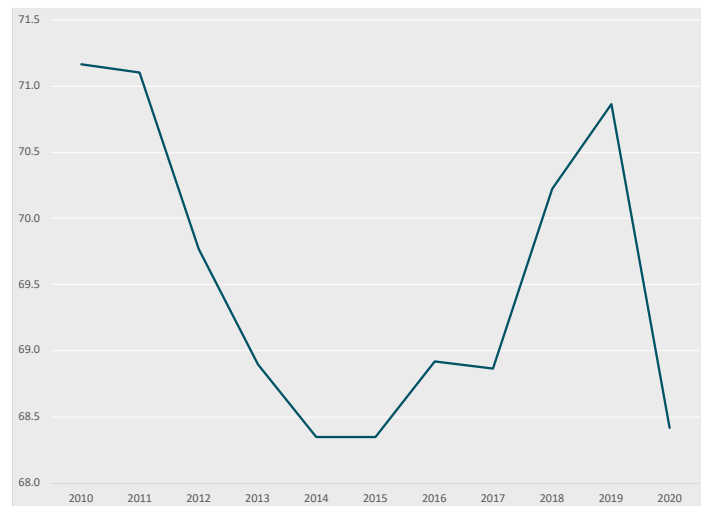


FIG. 1 Source: FPI calculations; see appendix

There are other reasons that New Yorkers deserve stronger hiring than just getting back to the 2019 or 2010 employee count. We don't want *just* the same services; we want smaller class sizes, shorter lines at the DMV, quicker emergency response and pothole remediation.

While there may be some technological improvements that help with needed efficiency, nothing can replace enough personnel.

And there are economic and equity reasons as well. Public employment in New York provides more than a million well-paid, stable jobs across the state, providing communities with strong bases for their local economies; estimates are that two private jobs (suppliers, services, restaurants, etc.) are created for every three public ones. Public employment also provides good jobs for people of color and for women, groups that are under-represented in well-paid private employment.

New Yorkers need to be sure that the recent federal budget relief is used not just to get back to where we were in 2019, but also to expand and improve on public services across the state.

Appendix

Year	State population (1)	Annual average employment, thousands (2)		
		State government	Local government	State + Local
2010	19,392,283	260.8	1,119.3	1,380.1
2011	19,465,197	259.3	1,124.8	1,384.0
2012	19,570,261	254.9	1,110.5	1,365.4
2013	19,651,127	252.7	1,101.2	1,353.9
2014	19,746,227	251.2	1,098.4	1,349.6
2015	19,795,791	250.7	1,102.4	1,353.0
2016	19,745,289	254.1	1,106.8	1,360.8
2017	19,849,399	257.1	1,109.8	1,366.9
2018	19,542,209	256.1	1,116.3	1,372.4
2019	19,453,561	257.5	1,121.0	1,378.5
2020	19,336,776	254.5	1,068.5	1,323.0

(1) U.S. Census Bureau

(2) New York State Dept. of Labor, Current Employment Statistics Survey

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