



2025-2026 Columbus Economy

Key Trends, Indicators, Local Insights

Population | Employment | Education | Income | Housing | Consumers | Crime



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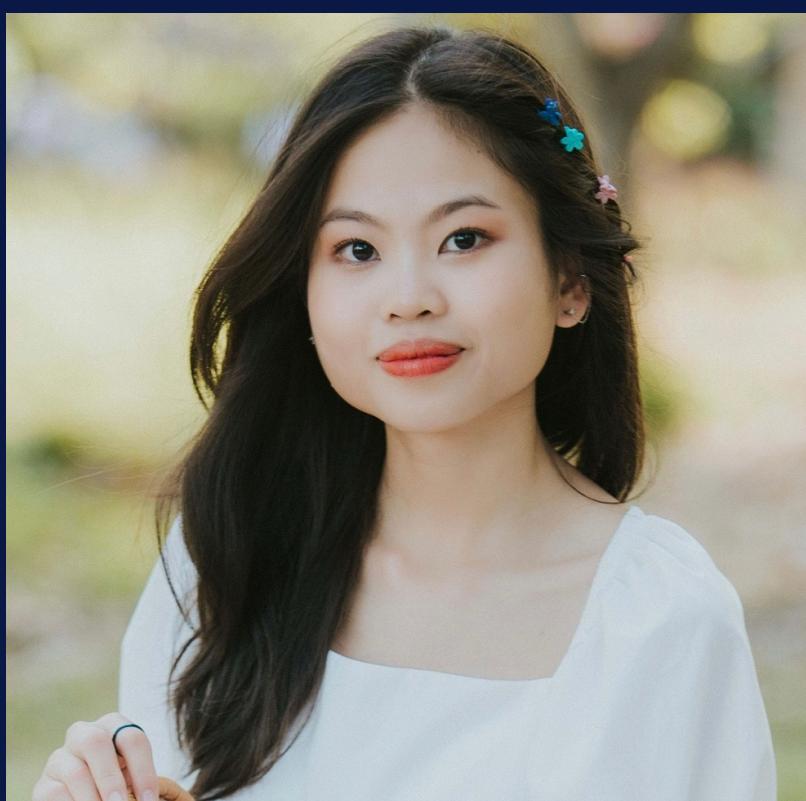
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Economic Stability and Areas of Strength

The Columbus economy in 2024–2025 reflects a period of stabilization rather than expansion. Population levels have remained steady following declines earlier in the decade, with overall stability supported by growth in the population aged 65 and older. While demographic aging presents long-run considerations, it has also sustained demand in the healthcare sector, which remains the largest civilian employer in Columbus and continues to grow at a moderate but steady pace. This sector provides an important source of employment stability and supports the local economy amid broader labor market softness.

Labor market conditions similarly reflect resilience rather than distress. Although job growth has been weak nationally and statewide, Columbus's labor market has remained relatively stable, with private-sector hiring stabilizing in early 2025 following declines in 2024. Growth in self-employment and business formation has continued, supported in part by federal and local government employment. Fort Benning (Fort Moore) plays a particularly critical role in anchoring economic stability, supporting an estimated 45,000–50,000 military, civilian, and contractor positions. Because defense-related employment is less sensitive to business cycles, this federal presence helps moderate fluctuations in employment and income during periods of private-sector softening.

Several sectors continue to demonstrate forward momentum. Manufacturing stands out as a key opportunity, with employment growing at an average annual rate of 3.1 percent and wages well above the local average, positioning it as a pathway toward higher-quality job growth. Crime trends also show improvement, with both violent and nonviolent crime declining from their 2023 peak, signaling progress in public safety conditions. Consumer data further indicate resilience among higher-income households, particularly in North Columbus, where transaction values remain higher and grocery spending has kept pace with inflation.

Recent development momentum further reinforces Columbus's economic capacity and long-term resilience. Ongoing investments in workforce development, technical training, infrastructure, and industrial expansion—particularly in manufacturing, healthcare, and aviation-related fields—strengthen the city's productive base and expand pathways into higher-paying employment. Continued investment in cultural and community assets also supports quality of life and place-based competitiveness, positioning Columbus to translate economic stability into sustained and more inclusive growth.

Structural Challenges to Sustainable Growth

Despite overall stability, Columbus faces a set of structural challenges that may constrain long-term economic performance if left unaddressed. Beneath steady population totals, demographic imbalances persist. Declines among younger and working-age cohorts, combined with fertility rates well below the replacement level, pose long-run risks to labor force growth and economic dynamism. Absent offsetting domestic or international migration, these trends may place increasing pressure on workforce availability.

Labor market indicators reflect these constraints. Job postings in 2025 have fallen below 2024 levels across Columbus, Georgia, and the United States, consistent with “no-hiring, no-firing” conditions and subdued labor demand. While Columbus’s unemployment rate remains below the national average, it is higher than Georgia’s and ranks among the higher rates across peer metropolitan areas in the state, signaling a comparative disadvantage rather than acute distress. Wage growth remains a central concern: average wages in Columbus continue to lag well behind state and national averages, limiting household income growth and contributing to rising leverage. The household debt-to-income ratio has climbed well above the state average, reflecting persistent pressure on household finances.

These wage dynamics are closely tied to the structure of the local labor market. Employment remains concentrated in lower-wage industries such as retail and accommodation and food services, while relatively few jobs require bachelor’s or postgraduate degrees. At the same time, employment declines in higher-paying sectors such as finance and insurance represent a loss of job quality and long-term earning potential. Education–occupation analysis further highlights gaps at the bachelor’s and master’s degree levels, constraining the supply of workers qualified for higher-wage roles.

Housing affordability has emerged as one of the most pressing challenges. Homeownership rates in both the City of Columbus and the broader metropolitan area remain well below national norms, reflecting structural affordability constraints. Rising rents and mortgage costs, combined with stagnant household incomes, have widened the affordability gap to levels not seen since the mid-2000s. Although Columbus home prices remain below the national median, faster local price growth has narrowed this advantage. Crime rates, while improving, remain elevated relative to state and national averages and continue to affect perceptions of safety, neighborhood stability, and investment competitiveness. Consumer data further reveal widening disparities across neighborhoods, with lower-income households—particularly in South Columbus—showing signs of financial strain.

Strategic Priorities and Policy Implications

Moving forward, policy efforts should focus on translating economic stability into higher-quality and more inclusive growth. While federal employment and healthcare provide important stabilizing anchors, long-term resilience will depend on strengthening private-sector job creation and improving job quality. Expanding advanced manufacturing and other higher-wage industries offers a clear opportunity to raise incomes and offset employment declines in higher-paying service sectors.

Workforce and education strategies should prioritize improving alignment between educational attainment and labor market demand, particularly at the bachelor's and master's degree levels. Improving student retention, progression, and completion rates may be as important as expanding enrollment in addressing persistent education–occupation gaps. Coordinated efforts across education providers, employers, and workforce agencies will be essential to strengthening the local talent pipeline.

Housing affordability will require integrated solutions that address both supply and income constraints. Expanding affordable housing options, improving access to mortgage financing, and supporting pathways to homeownership can strengthen community stability, reduce domestic out-migration, and support long-term population retention. Continued investment in public safety, prevention, and community-based initiatives remains critical to sustaining recent improvements in crime and strengthening confidence among residents and businesses.

Finally, reducing neighborhood-level disparities—particularly in consumer stress and income outcomes—should be a priority for fostering inclusive growth. Targeted business investment, workforce development, and quality-of-life improvements can help ensure that economic stability translates into broadly shared and sustainable economic progress across all parts of Columbus.

Sincerely,



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POPULATION

Columbus's population stabilized in 2023 and 2024 and is expected to remain steady in 2025. As of the time this report was written, the official 2025 census figures had not yet been released; however, the population is estimated at 323,470. Nevertheless, this stability masks differing trends across age groups, as growth in the elderly population (65+) over the past two years has offset declines in younger age groups, primarily those aged 0-24 and 46-65. However, Columbus's elderly population (16%) remains comparable to Georgia's (15.14%) and slightly below the U.S. average (17.43%).

While population aging may reduce labor force participation, it also supports continued growth in the health care industry, which remains the largest civilian employer in Columbus, with 20,226 employees and an average annual employment growth rate of 1.4 percent.

The decline in population in Columbus is partially attributed to the general declining fertility trend in the U.S. According to the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), the General Fertility Rate (GFR)¹ in the U.S. declined by an average annual rate of 2% between 2014 and 2019, with the trend continuing to worsen before showing a slight improvement in 2021. Of particular concern for Columbus is that estimates indicate the Total Fertility Rate (TFR)² among white and black women (black and white comprise 85% of the Columbus' population), are 1.6 and 1.8, respectively—well below the replacement rate of 2.1. This fertility shortfall could cost the Columbus population 11,000 people every generation. Investigating the impact of the declining fertility rate in the United States on population growth in Columbus, and distinguishing this effect from the role of domestic migration in shaping the local economy, represents an important avenue for future research.

**Population and Migration Rates
Columbus, GA-AL MSA (2020–2024)**

Year	Population	Net International Migration Rate	Net Domestic Migration Rate
2020	329,195	n/a	n/a
2021	326,487	0.5	-8.9
2022	324,118	2.5	-10.4
2023	323,936	2.2	-4.5
2024	324,343	2.4	-2.2

**Percent of Forecasted Population Based On Age Group
Columbus, GA-AL MSA (2026)**

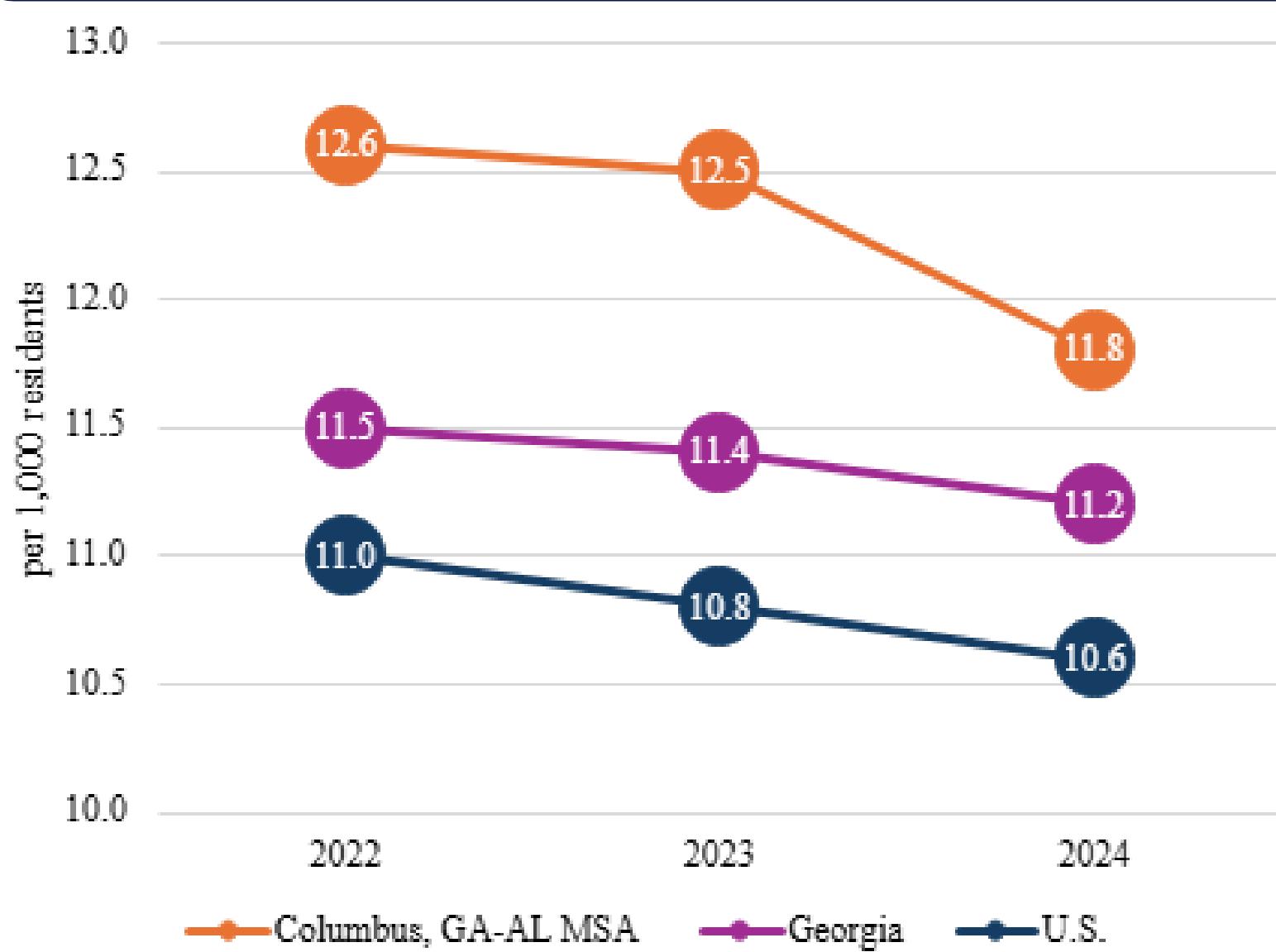
Age Group	Columbus	Georgia	USA
Age 0-24	32.03%	31.68%	30.17%
Age 25-45	28.92%	28.58%	28.31%
Age 46-65	22.74%	24.25%	23.82%
Age 66+	16.30%	15.49%	17.70%

Note:

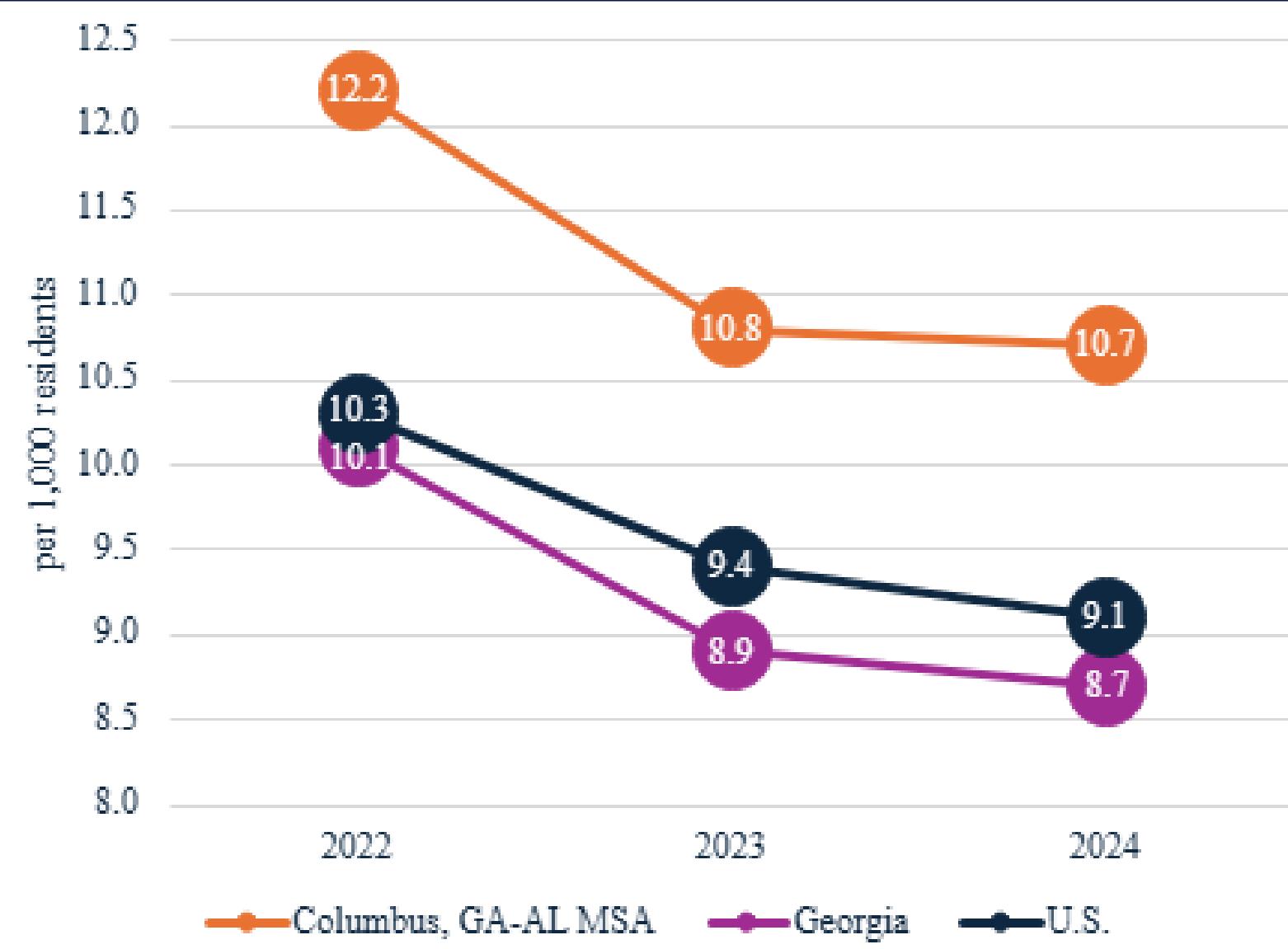
¹ General Fertility Rate (GFR): The General Fertility Rate (GFR) measures the number of live births per 1,000 women of childbearing age (typically ages 15–44) in a given year and is commonly used to track short-term fertility trends.

² Total Fertility Rate (TFR): The Total Fertility Rate (TFR) estimates the average number of children a woman is expected to have over her lifetime based on current age-specific birth rates and is used to assess long-run population sustainability

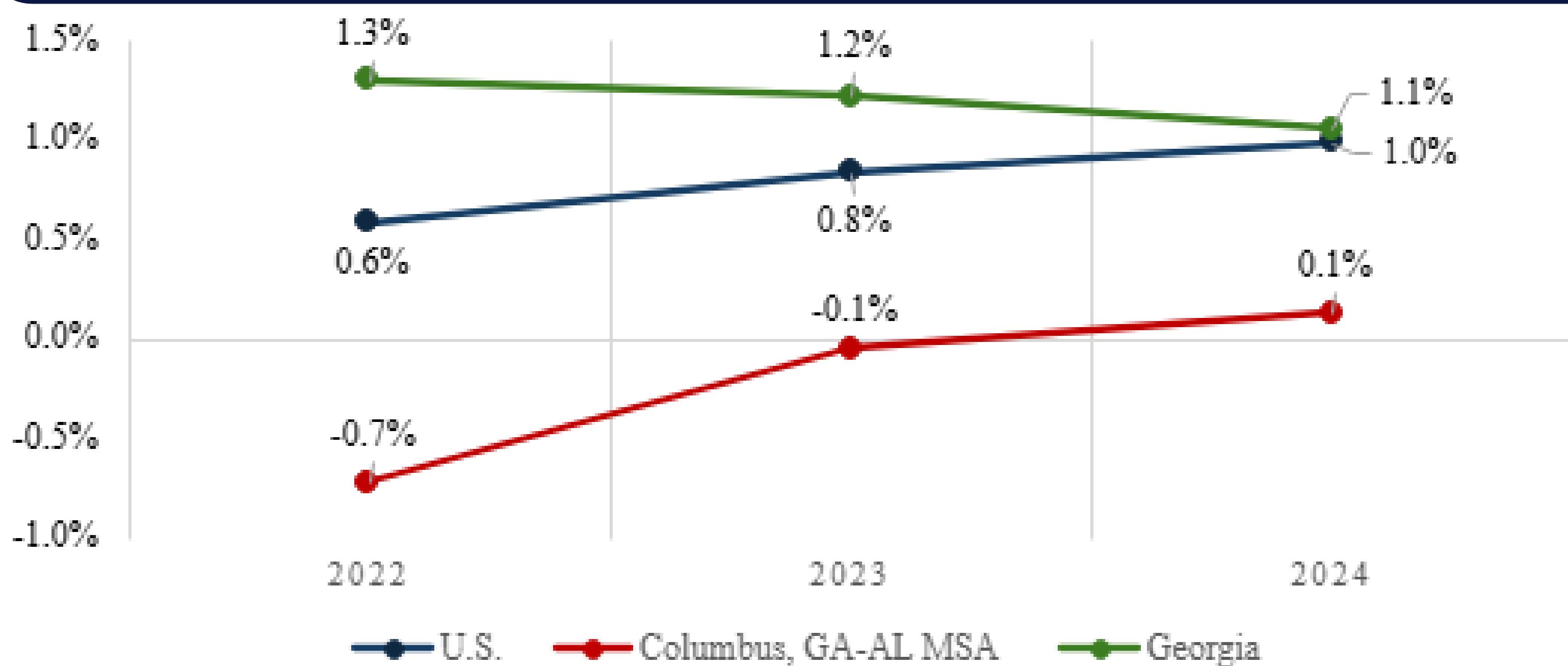
Birth Rate Trend



Death Rate Trend

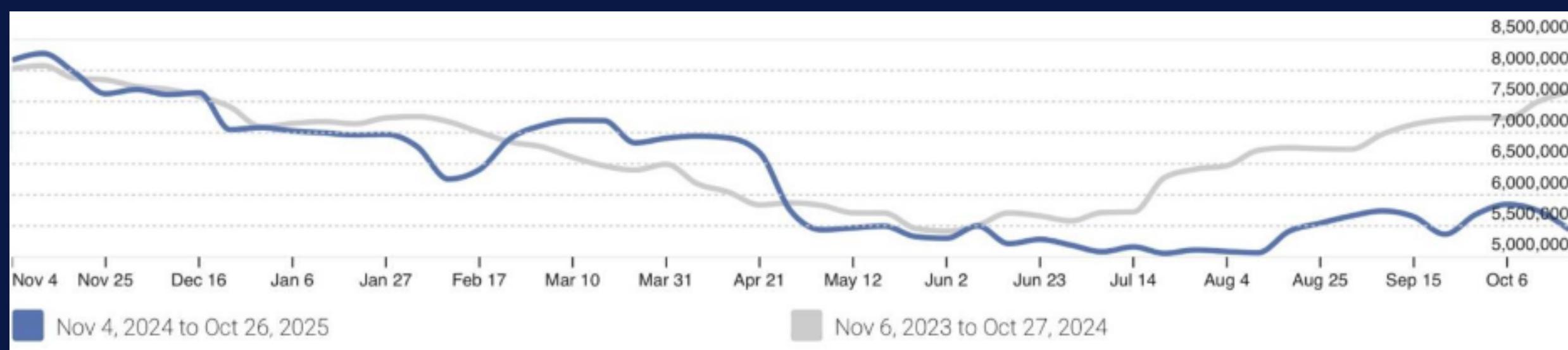


Percentage Change in Population Year-over-Year (2022-2024)

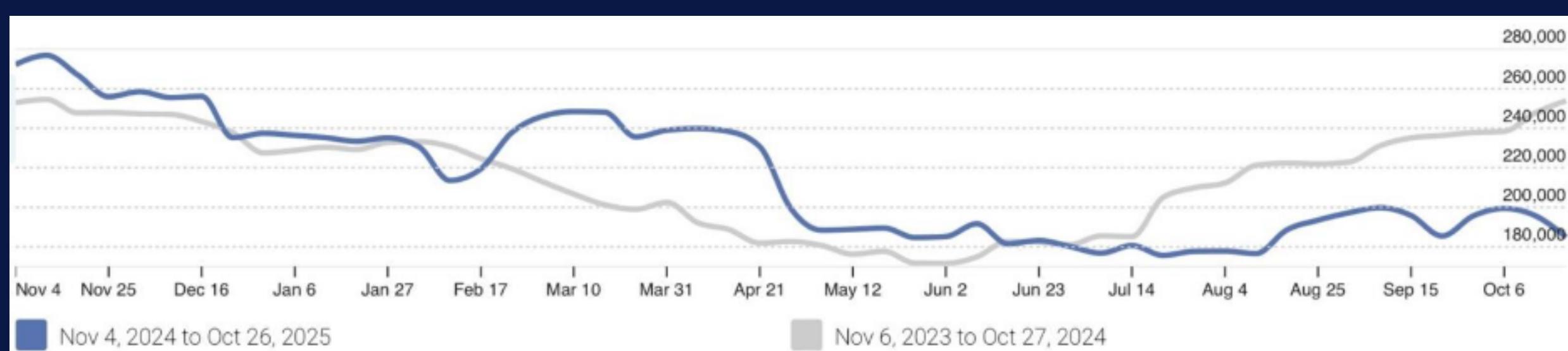


EMPLOYMENT, WAGES, AND THE LABOR MARKET

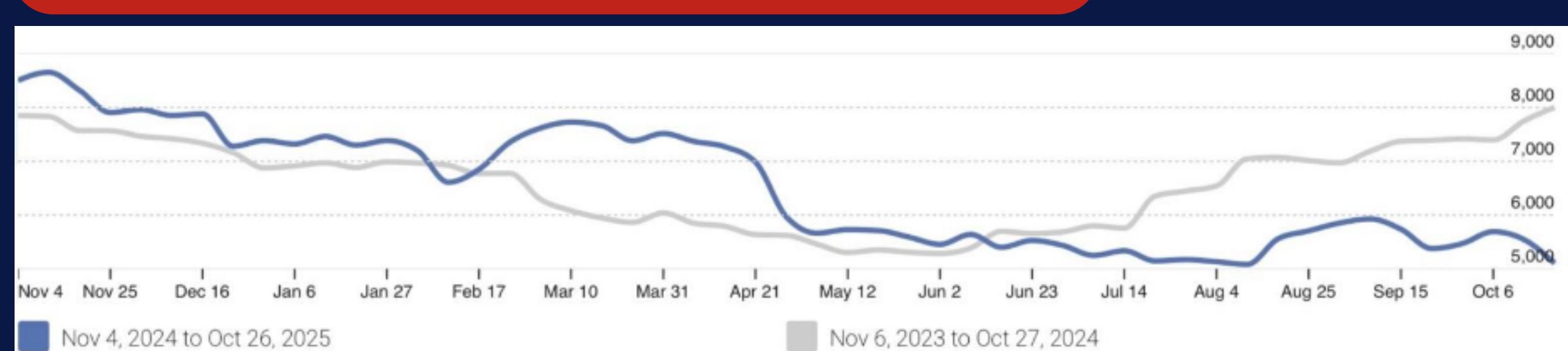
Active Job Ads by Date - USA



Active Job Ads by Date - Georgia

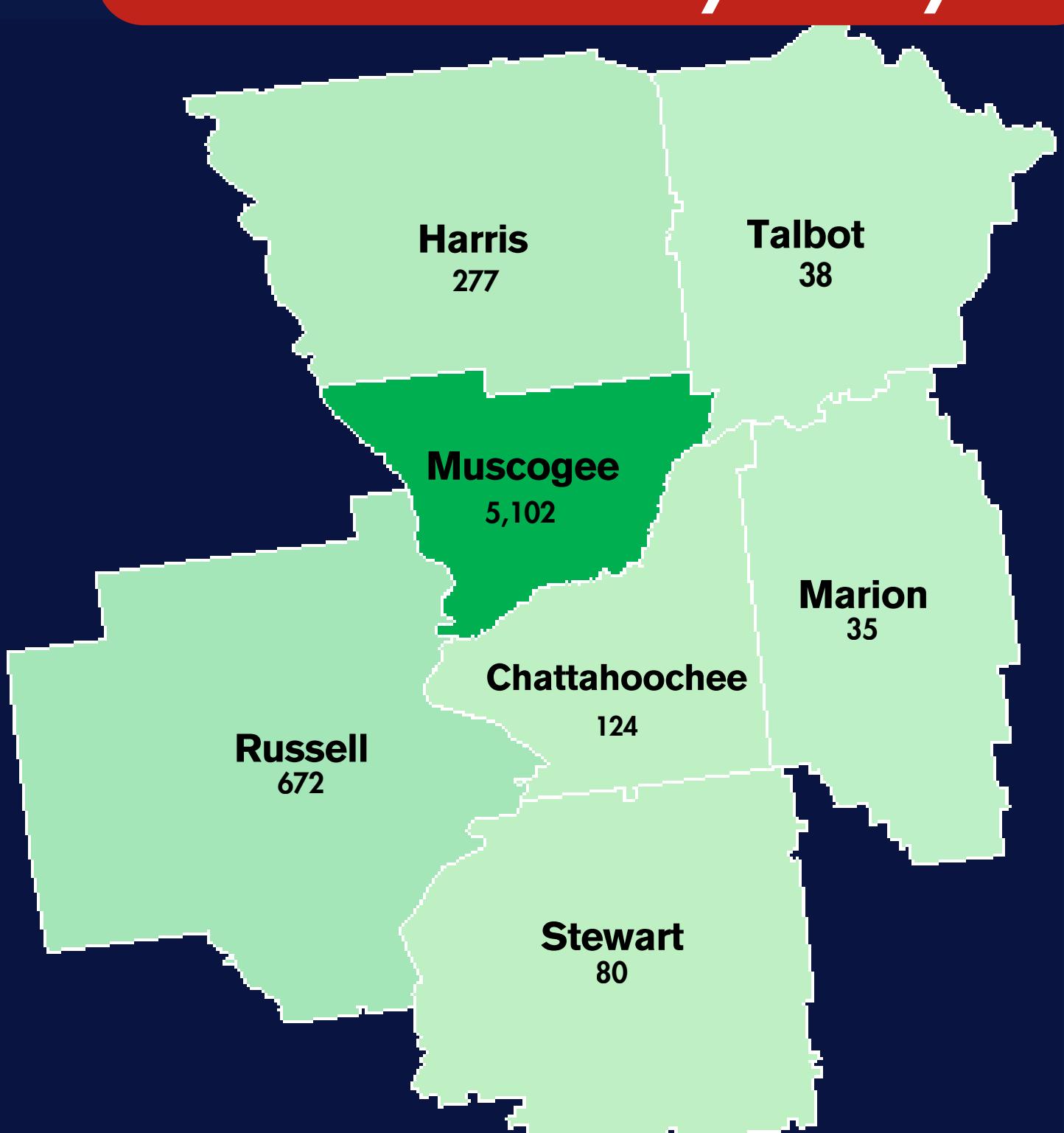


Active Job Ads by Date - Columbus, GA-AL MSA



The “no-hiring, no-firing” conditions in the labor market and weak job growth in 2025 are reflected in monthly active job advertisement trends. The number of job advertisements in 2025 has fallen below 2024 levels for the United States, Georgia, and Columbus.

Online Job Ads by County



While the majority of employment activity and online job ads are concentrated in Muscogee and Harris counties, other data show a substantial increase in employment in Talbot County, indicating recent growth in sectors such as utilities, mining, and manufacturing.

FORT BENNING FOSTERS EMPLOYMENT STABILITY AND ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY IN COLUMBUS

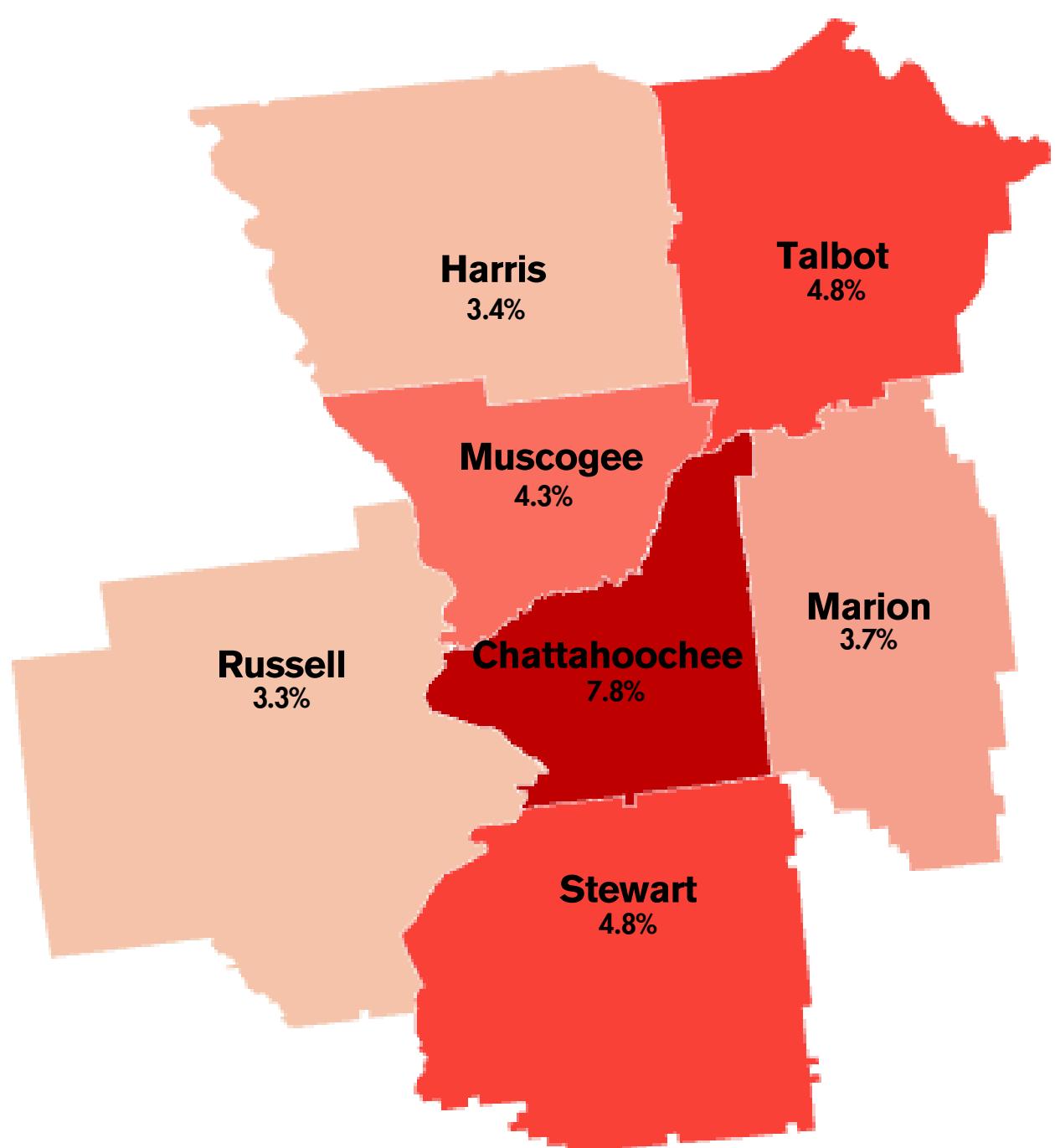
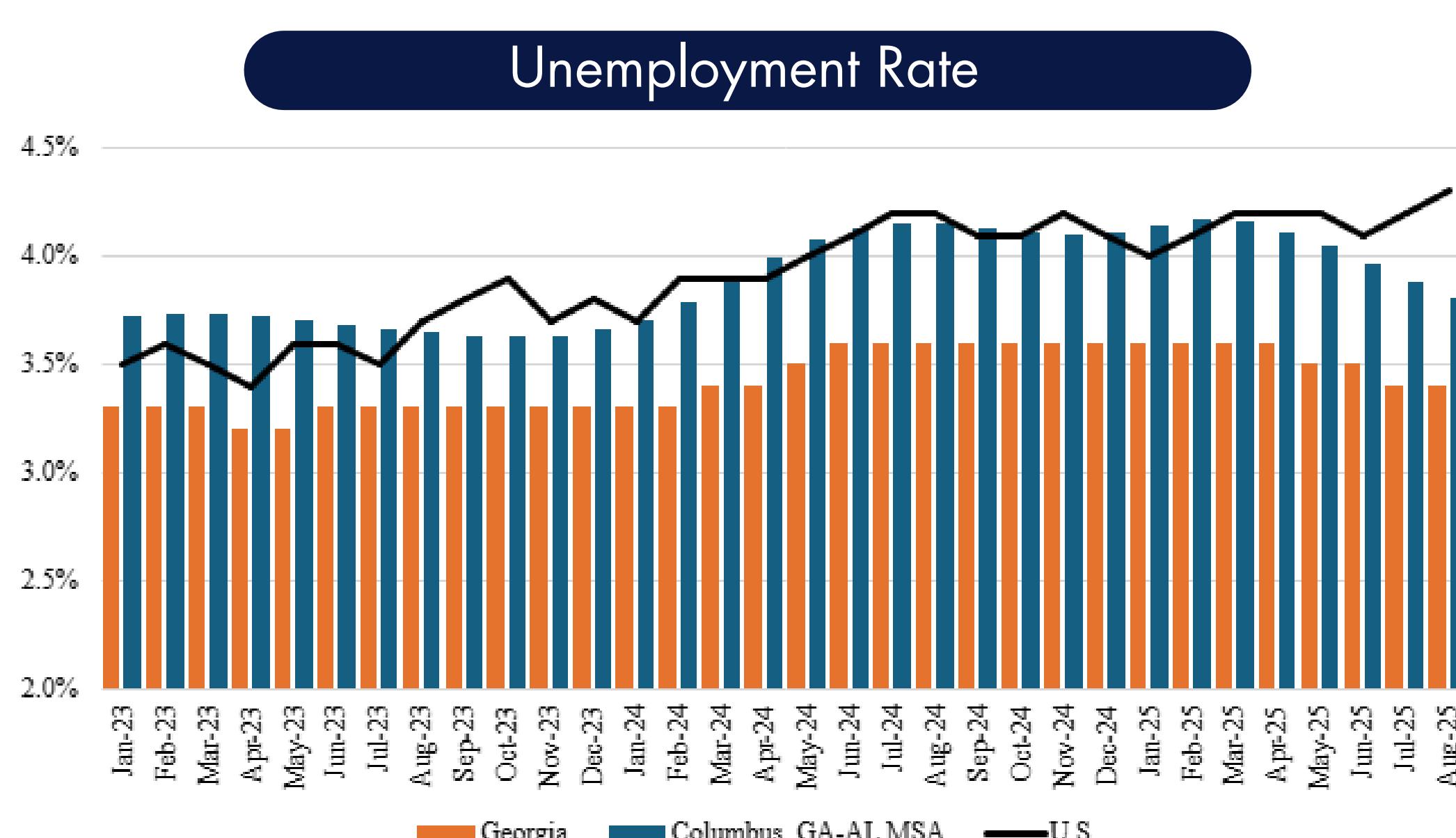
In Columbus, private-sector hiring activity declined during 2024 and stabilized in the first quarter of 2025. In contrast, self-employment has continued to expand, with the number of businesses increasing throughout 2024, supported in part by growth in federal and local government employment.

Fort Benning plays a critical stabilizing role in the Columbus economy by anchoring a large share of local employment in relatively non-cyclical federal jobs. The installation supports an estimated 45,000–50,000 military, civilian, and contractor positions, making it the largest employer in the region. Unlike private-sector industries that are more sensitive to business cycles, defense-related employment and payrolls tend to remain stable during economic downturns, helping to moderate fluctuations in local employment and income.

Employment Growth

	Self Employment	Private Employment	Federal Government	State Government	Local Government
2023 Q1	-2.2%	2.9%	-0.6%	-4.7%	1.9%
2023 Q2	-6.2%	2.4%	-0.4%	-3.8%	1.3%
2023 Q3	-4.4%	2.1%	1.0%	-3.5%	1.7%
2023 Q4	-2.8%	2.7%	1.8%	-4.7%	-1.1%
2024 Q1	1.0%	-1.5%	1.6%	-0.2%	1.0%
2024 Q2	3.3%	-2.1%	2.7%	-0.4%	2.4%
2024 Q3	3.9%	-2.8%	3.0%	0.9%	2.1%
2024 Q4	0.8%	-3.3%	2.4%	-1.1%	3.0%
2025 Q1	-2.7%	0.0%	1.4%	-1.2%	1.3%

Unemployment Rate by County



According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the unemployment rate in Columbus rose to 4.0 percent in September 2025, remaining above Georgia's rate of 3.4 percent but below the national average of 4.6 percent.

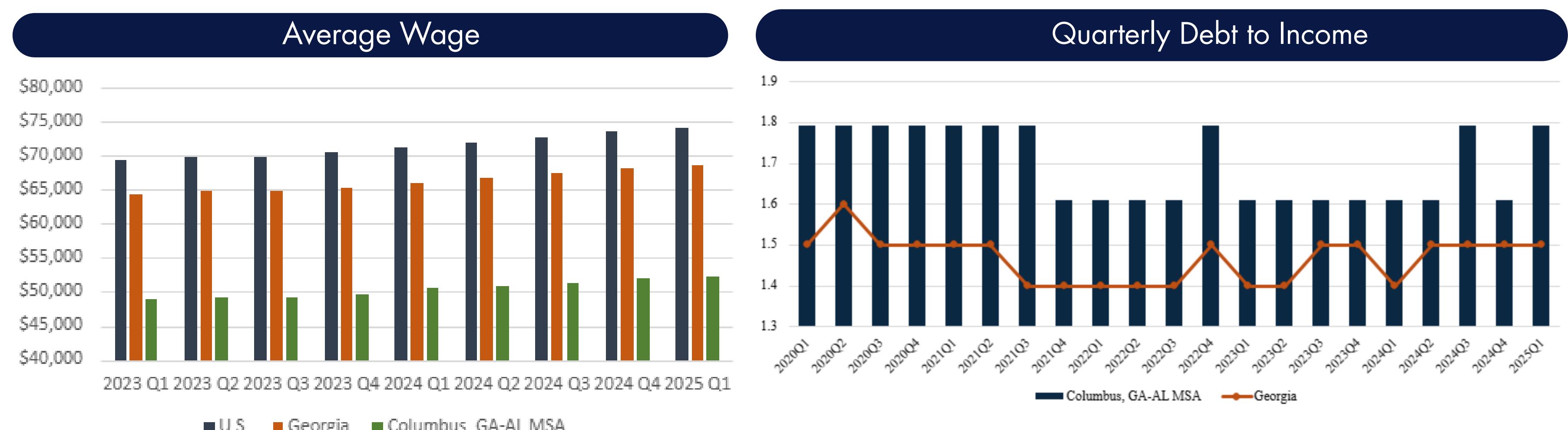
Among Georgia's metropolitan statistical areas, the Columbus, GA-AL MSA recorded the third-highest unemployment rate. Although this level does not indicate severe labor market distress—given that Columbus's unemployment rate remains below the national average and is supported by a relatively stable base of federal employment (including Fort Benning) and healthcare employment—it does suggest a comparative labor market disadvantage relative to most peer MSAs in the state. This pattern highlights the potential role of targeted policy interventions and business investment strategies in supporting private-sector job creation, improving job quality, and promoting longer-term labor market development and sustainable economic growth.

Rank	Metropolitan Statistical Area	Unemployment Rate (%)
1	Augusta–Richmond County, GA–SC	4.3
2	Albany, GA	4.2
3	Columbus, GA–AL	4.0
4	Macon–Bibb County, GA	4.0
5	Hinesville, GA	3.9
6	Valdosta, GA	3.8
7	Dalton, GA	3.6
8	Atlanta–Sandy Springs–Roswell, GA	3.4
9	Rome, GA	3.3
10	Athens–Clarke County, GA	3.1
11	Brunswick–St. Simons, GA	3.0
12	Warner Robins, GA	3.0
13	Savannah, GA	2.9
14	Gainesville, GA	2.7

Georgia Metropolitan Statistical Areas Unemployment Rate

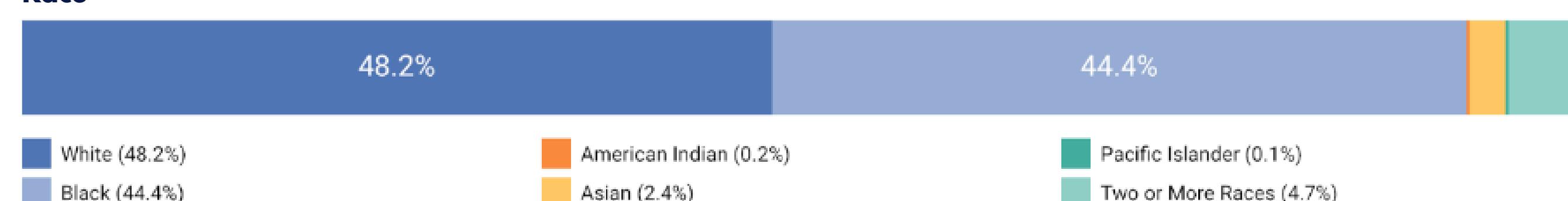
Average wages across all industries in Columbus increased by 3.2 percent year over year to \$52,188, well below the Georgia average of \$68,575 (3.8 percent increase) and the national average of \$74,181 (4.1 percent increase). Persistently lower wage growth in Columbus continues to constrain housing affordability and has contributed to rising household leverage, with the debt-to-income ratio increasing to 179 percent in the first quarter of 2025, compared to 150 percent for Georgia.

Weak wage growth in Columbus is closely tied to the composition of the local labor market, where only 24.7 percent of jobs require a bachelor's degree and just 4.7 percent require a postgraduate degree. This concentration in lower-skill occupations limits opportunities for higher-wage employment and reflects broader challenges related to job quality and long-term income growth in the local economy.

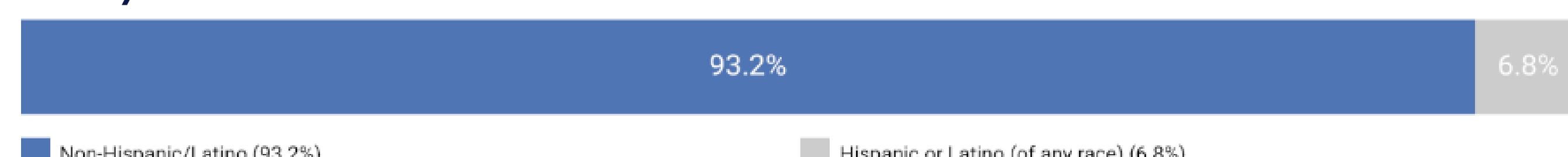


LABOR MARKET COMPOSITION

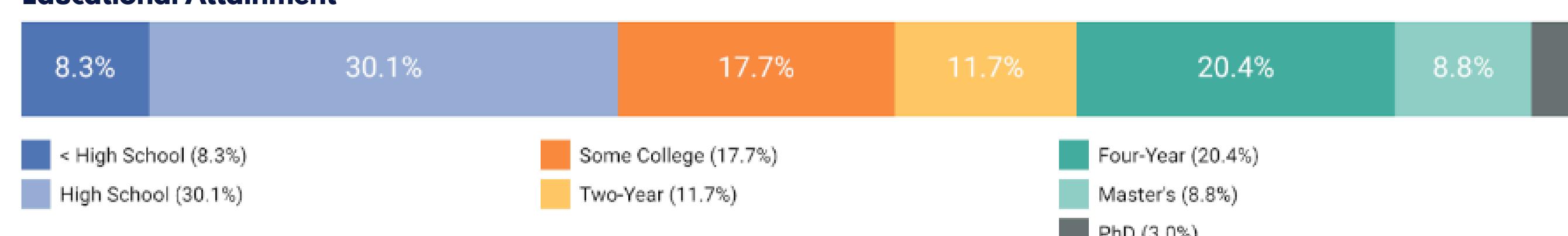
Race



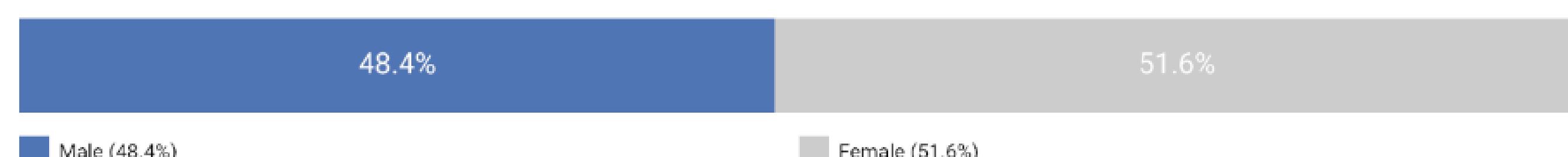
Ethnicity



Educational Attainment



Gender



Age



Education and Training Requirements



Industry Snapshot

Industry	Current			3-Year History		
	Employment	Wages	LQ	Employment Change	Annual	
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	225	\$77,131	0.50	-26	-3.5%	
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	6,117	\$70,290	0.67	-2	0.0%	
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	1,816	\$27,351	0.69	260	5.3%	
Health Care and Social Assistance	20,226	\$59,251	1.06	847	1.4%	
Construction	5,813	\$57,981	0.78	7	0.0%	
Transportation and Warehousing	3,715	\$48,237	0.59	154	1.4%	
Management of Companies and Enterprises	1,424	\$163,201	0.72	-448	-8.7%	
Other Services (except Public Administration)	6,054	\$30,763	1.13	59	0.3%	
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	817	\$39,685	0.54	-1	0.0%	
Utilities	379	\$91,439	0.58	34	3.2%	
Unclassified	137	\$76,489	0.82	-77	-13.8%	
Accommodation and Food Services	13,967	\$22,873	1.28	788	2.0%	
Administrative, Support, Waste Management and Remediation Services	7,338	\$36,591	0.97	-1,500	-6.0%	
Wholesale Trade	2,568	\$68,900	0.55	83	1.1%	
Real estate, Rental and Leasing	1,974	\$53,364	0.90	-96	-1.6%	
Manufacturing	10,897	\$68,559	1.11	950	3.1%	
Public Administration	8,229	\$59,267	1.39	379	1.6%	
Finance and Insurance	7,592	\$89,787	1.54	-1,337	-5.3%	
Information	1,211	\$58,675	0.51	122	3.6%	
Educational Services	10,354	\$51,284	1.02	-171	-0.5%	
Retail Trade	14,659	\$31,160	1.21	344	0.8%	
Total - All Industries	125,511	\$52,188	1.00	371	0.1%	

Health care and social assistance continue to lead employment in Columbus, followed by retail, accommodation and food services, manufacturing, and education. Accommodation and food services and retail together employ 28,626 workers, representing approximately 23 percent of the Columbus workforce. However, relatively low wages in these industries—\$22,873 in accommodation and food services and \$31,160 in retail—contribute to overall wage pressure in Columbus and pose a challenge to sustained wage growth.

Manufacturing employment has grown at an average annual rate of 3.1 percent, with average wages of \$68,559, presenting a meaningful opportunity for policymakers to expand the share of higher-quality, higher-paying jobs by placing greater emphasis on the manufacturing sector. Strengthening manufacturing could also help offset the decline in employment observed in the finance and insurance industry over the past three years.

EDUCATION

Programs Gaps

CIP Code	Title	<2yrs Gap	Associate's Gap	Bachelor's Gap	Master's Gap	PhD Gap	Total Award Gap
52.0201	Business Administration and Management, General	(11)	(8)	(47)	(22)	(3)	(91)
30.1601	Accounting and Computer Science	(2)	(3)	(42)	(19)	(1)	(66)
52.0206	Non-Profit/Public/Organizational Management	(6)	(6)	(28)	(17)	(4)	(61)
52.0801	Finance, General	(5)	(4)	(38)	(12)	(1)	(61)
52.0101	Business/Commerce, General	(8)	(6)	(31)	(14)	(2)	(60)
01.8202	Veterinary Office Management/Administration	(8)	(6)	(24)	(14)	(3)	(57)
13.0101	Education, General	(3)	(3)	(17)	(25)	(5)	(54)
51.2001	Pharmacy	(3)	(3)	(15)	(12)	(15)	(47)
51.2008	Clinical, Hospital, and Managed Care Pharmacy	(3)	(3)	(15)	(12)	(15)	(47)
51.2201	Public Health, General	(4)	(3)	(18)	(15)	(7)	(46)
52.0810	Financial Risk Management	(4)	(3)	(28)	(9)	(1)	(46)
30.7001	Data Science, General	(2)	(1)	(23)	(17)	(2)	(45)
51.0705	Medical Office Management/Administration	(11)	(7)	(13)	(10)	(3)	(44)
51.2213	Patient Safety and Healthcare Quality	(3)	(3)	(18)	(14)	(6)	(44)
52.1301	Management Science	(4)	(3)	(21)	(13)	(3)	(44)
30.0801	Mathematics and Computer Science	(2)	(1)	(22)	(16)	(2)	(43)
30.3901	Economics and Computer Science	(2)	(1)	(22)	(16)	(2)	(43)
52.1101	International Business/Trade/Commerce	(5)	(4)	(21)	(10)	(1)	(42)
11.0102	Artificial Intelligence	(2)	(1)	(22)	(15)	(2)	(42)
11.0103	Information Technology	(2)	(1)	(22)	(15)	(2)	(42)
11.0701	Computer Science	(2)	(1)	(22)	(15)	(2)	(42)
11.0804	Modeling, Virtual Environments and Simulation	(2)	(1)	(22)	(15)	(2)	(42)
30.4801	Linguistics and Computer Science	(2)	(1)	(22)	(15)	(2)	(42)
51.2011	Pharmaceutical Marketing and Management	(3)	(3)	(17)	(13)	(6)	(42)
52.0215	Risk Management	(4)	(3)	(26)	(7)	(1)	(41)

The table provides a broad analysis of the award–occupation gap in the Columbus area. While the results should be interpreted with caution³, as discussed below, the analysis highlights a clear need to expand bachelor’s and master’s degree programs, as the largest gaps are concentrated in these educational attainment levels. Strengthening pathways between education providers, employers, and workforce initiatives—especially in manufacturing, healthcare, and technical fields—will be essential to raising long-term wage growth and improving labor market outcomes.

Note:

³ Awards data are based upon degrees conferred for the academic year 2022-2023 and are provided by the National Center for Education Statistics. Occupation employment data are derived from the most recent four quarters of industry employment (from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, updated quarterly) and the industry/occupation matrix available for the region.

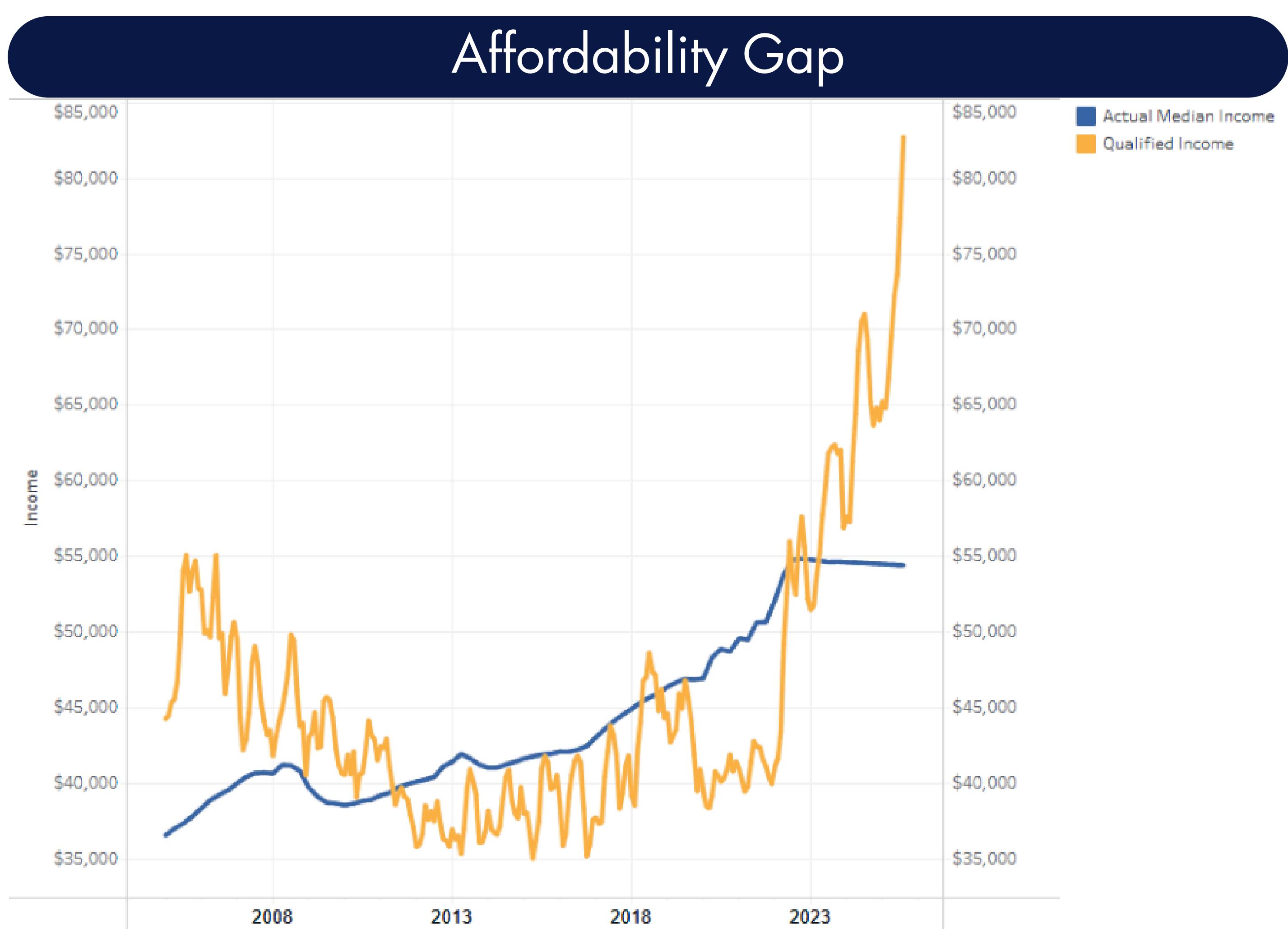
The total award gap for a program is the sum of all negative occupation award gaps within the CIP-SOC crosswalk.

The analysis should be interpreted with caution because we used 2-digit SOC codes, which group together multiple detailed 6-digit occupations. As a result, some occupation-level variation may not be fully captured. Similarly, the award gaps reflect broad academic program areas that include many distinct occupations.

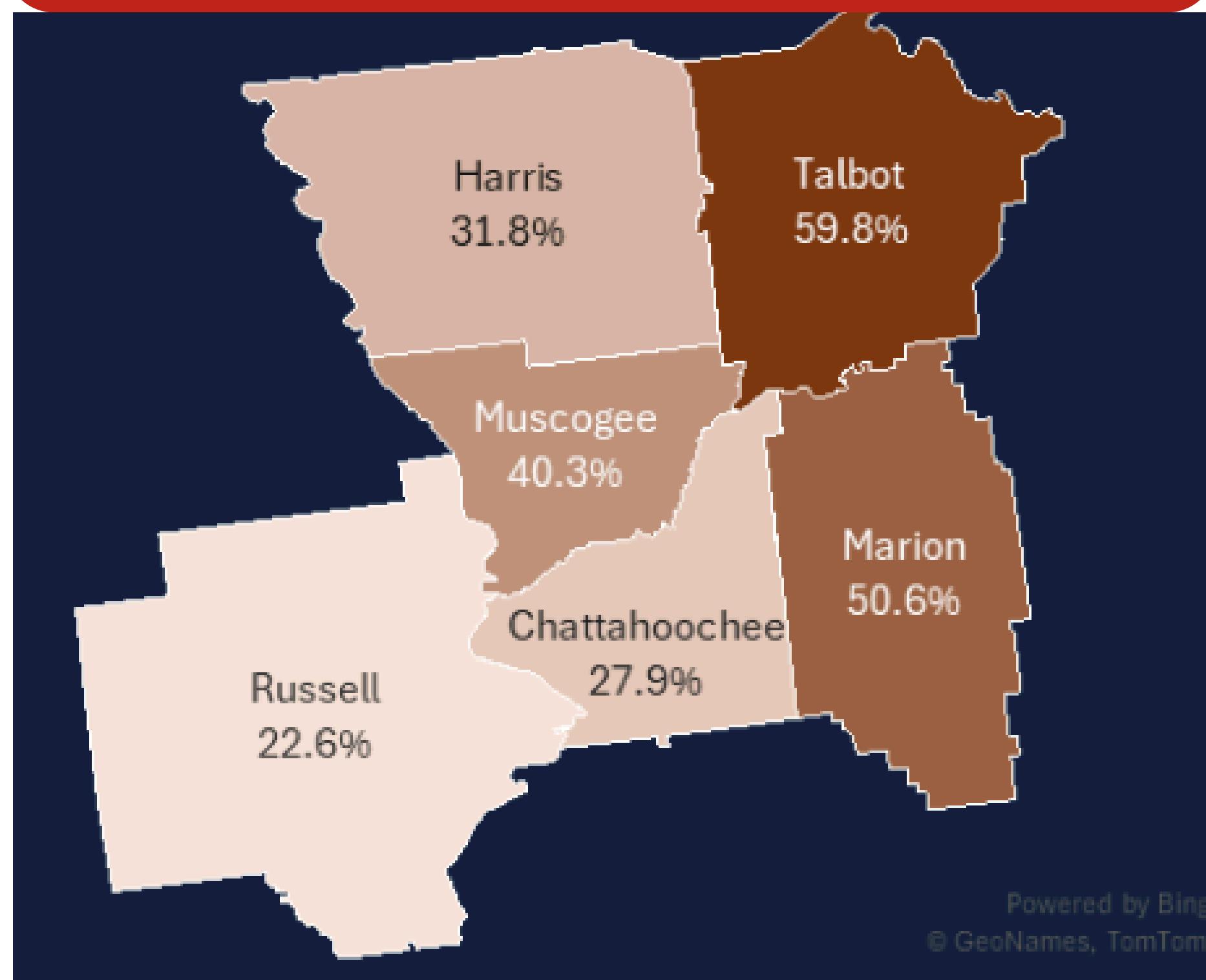
A more detailed analysis, using finer-level SOC codes and more specific program classifications, should be conducted to obtain more precise findings and occupation-specific insights.

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

Housing in the City of Columbus is characterized by relatively low homeownership. Slightly over 52 percent of occupied housing units are owner-occupied with a mortgage, while approximately 48 percent of households are renter-occupied. This ownership rate is well below the national average of roughly 65 percent, highlighting structural affordability challenges. Homeownership is somewhat higher in the greater Columbus, GA–AL Metropolitan Statistical Area, at approximately 57 percent, but it remains below national norms and reflects persistently low ownership across the region. Beyond affordability, homeownership plays an important role in fostering community stability and a sense of belonging, which can help reduce domestic out-migration. In this context, investments in affordable housing and accessible mortgage programs may not only improve housing outcomes but also support population retention, long-term population growth, and more sustainable economic development in Columbus.. According to HUD Fair Market Rent estimates for the Columbus, GA–AL metro, average rents are approximately \$883 for a studio, \$937 for a one-bedroom, \$1,108 for a two-bedroom, and \$1,463 for a three-bedroom unit. Meanwhile, the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta estimates that the median monthly mortgage payment in August 2025 reached about \$2,068. With mortgage costs and rents both elevated, while median household income remains relatively stagnant, housing affordability in Columbus remains a significant challenge for many households.

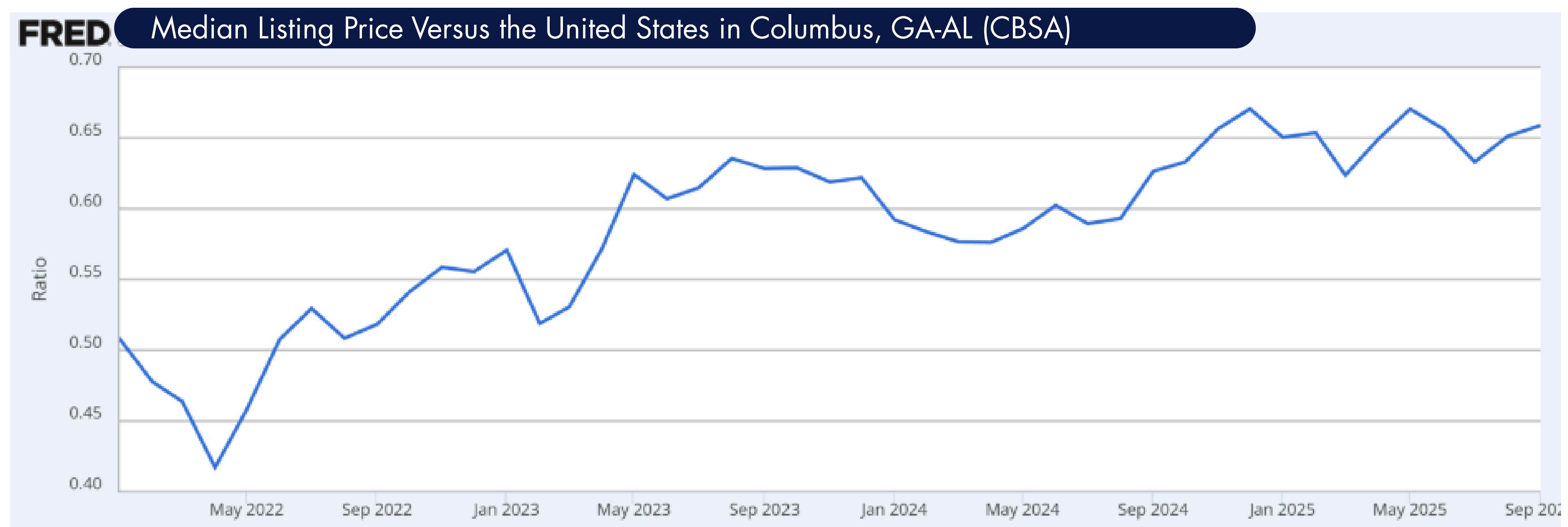


Median Income to Mortgage Payment by County

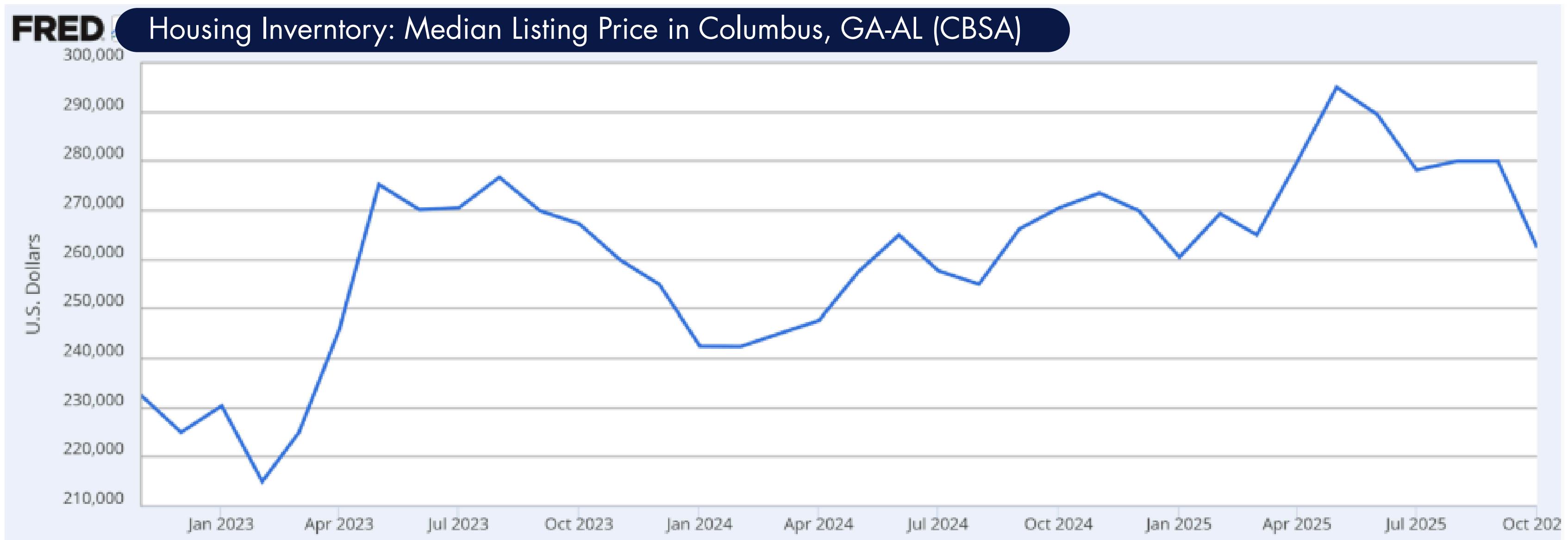


According to the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, the median home price in Columbus reached \$267,750 in August 2025, substantially exceeding the median household income of \$54,382, which has stagnated for the past three years. As a result, the gap between qualified income and actual income widened to 52% (qualified income = 1.52x actual income), marking the largest affordability imbalance since the index began tracking in 2005.

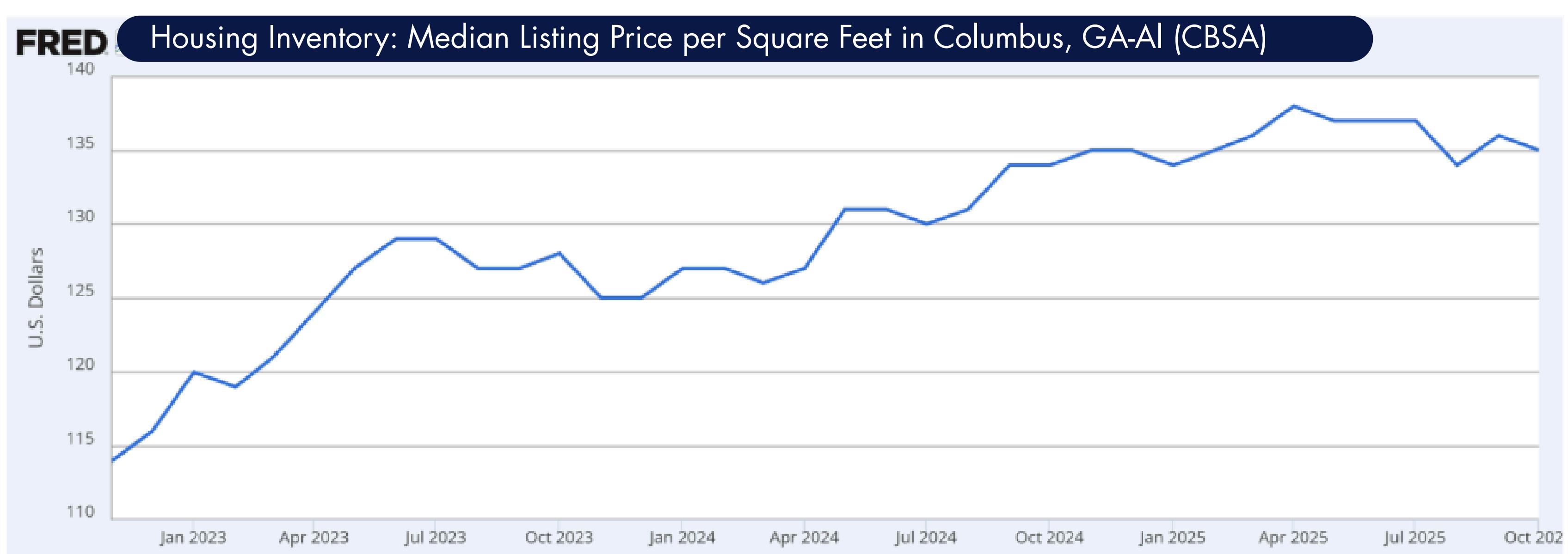
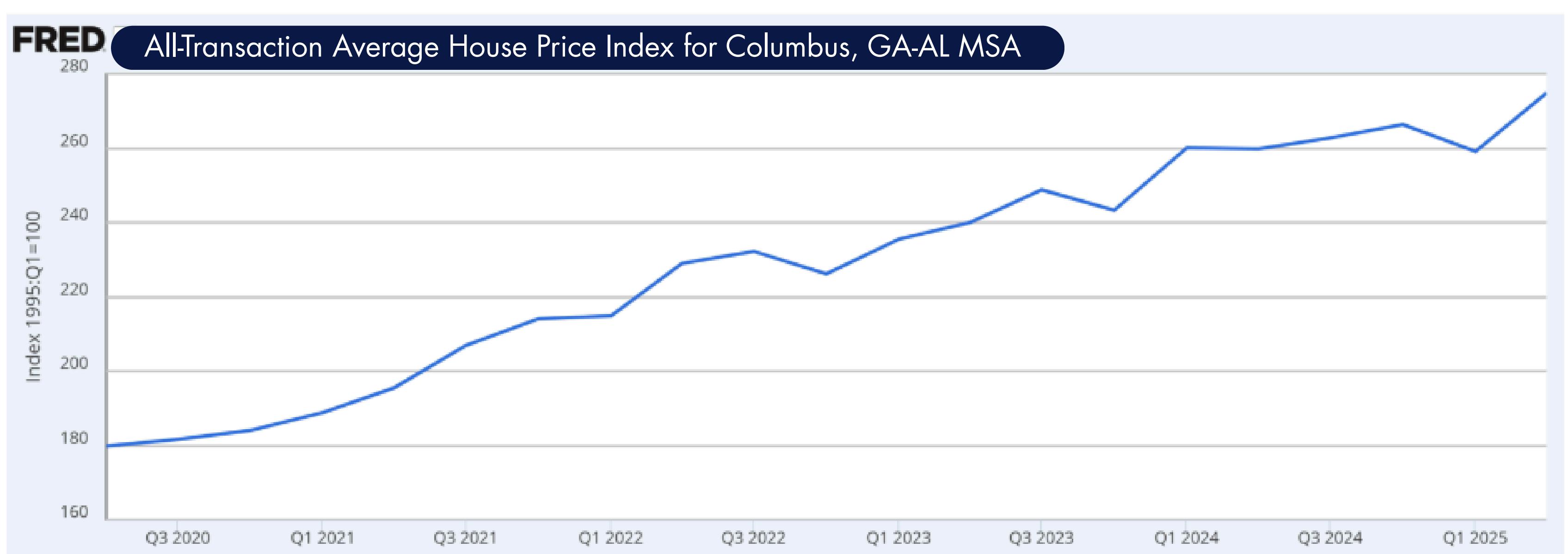
The Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta estimates that in August 2025, the median monthly mortgage payment for a typical home in the Columbus, GA-AL metro reached \$2,068. This includes \$1,537 in principal and interest, \$198 for home insurance, \$221 in property taxes, and \$112 in private mortgage insurance. These estimates highlight the rising cost of homeownership in the region. As mortgage rates and home prices remain elevated, affordability pressures continue to intensify for prospective buyers.

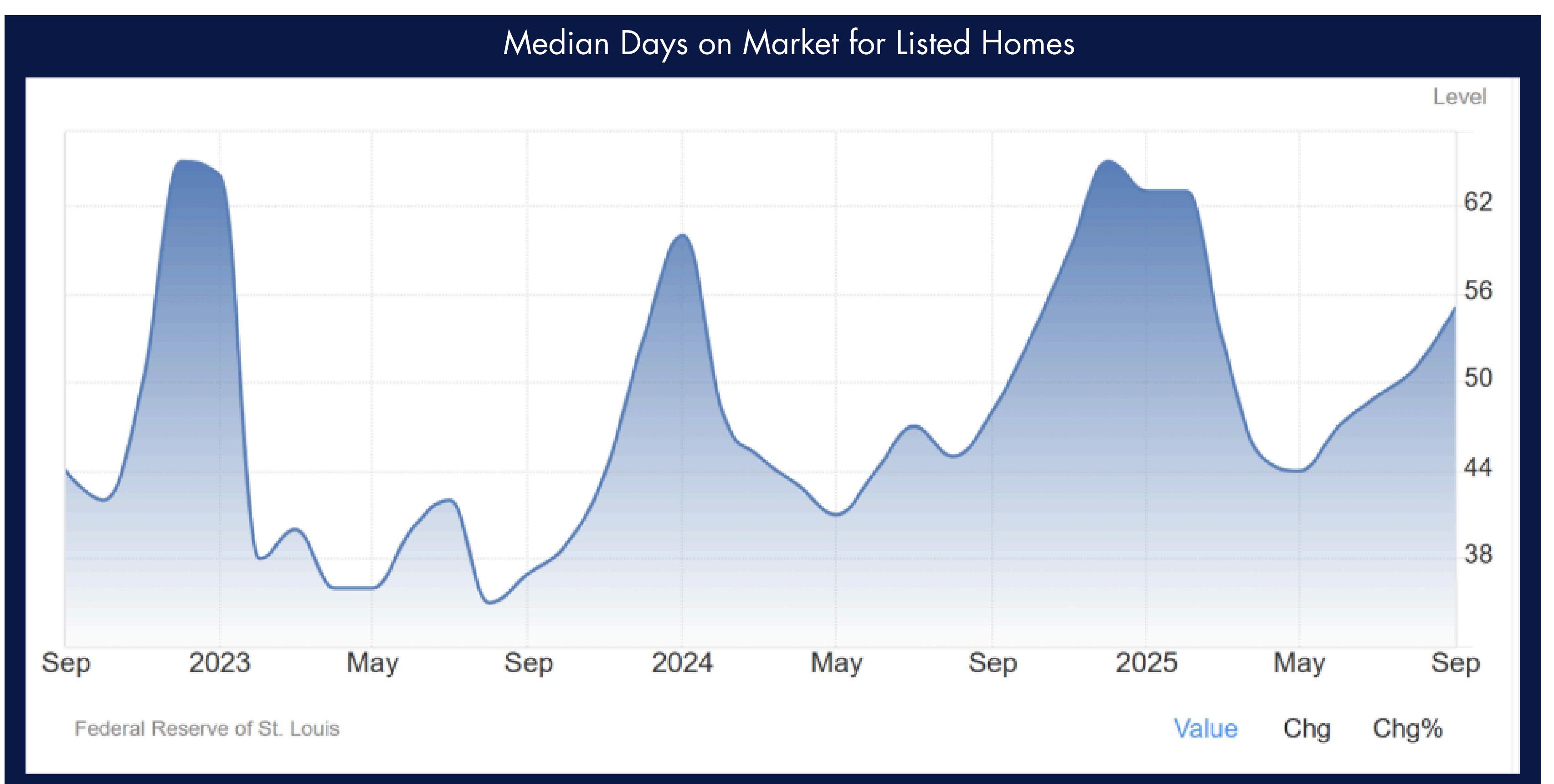


The gap between U.S. and Columbus home prices has narrowed, as Columbus prices have risen faster than the national average. In 2025, the median Columbus home reached 67% of the U.S. median price and remained elevated relative to national trend throughout the year.



The median home price has been on an upward trend over the past three years, reaching a range of \$260,000 to \$280,000 in 2025. Data from the U.S. Federal Housing Finance Agency support this trend, showing that the average actual home sale price in Columbus reached \$274,000 in the second quarter of 2025. However, data suggest that the median listing price per square foot has stabilized, hovering around \$135 in 2025.

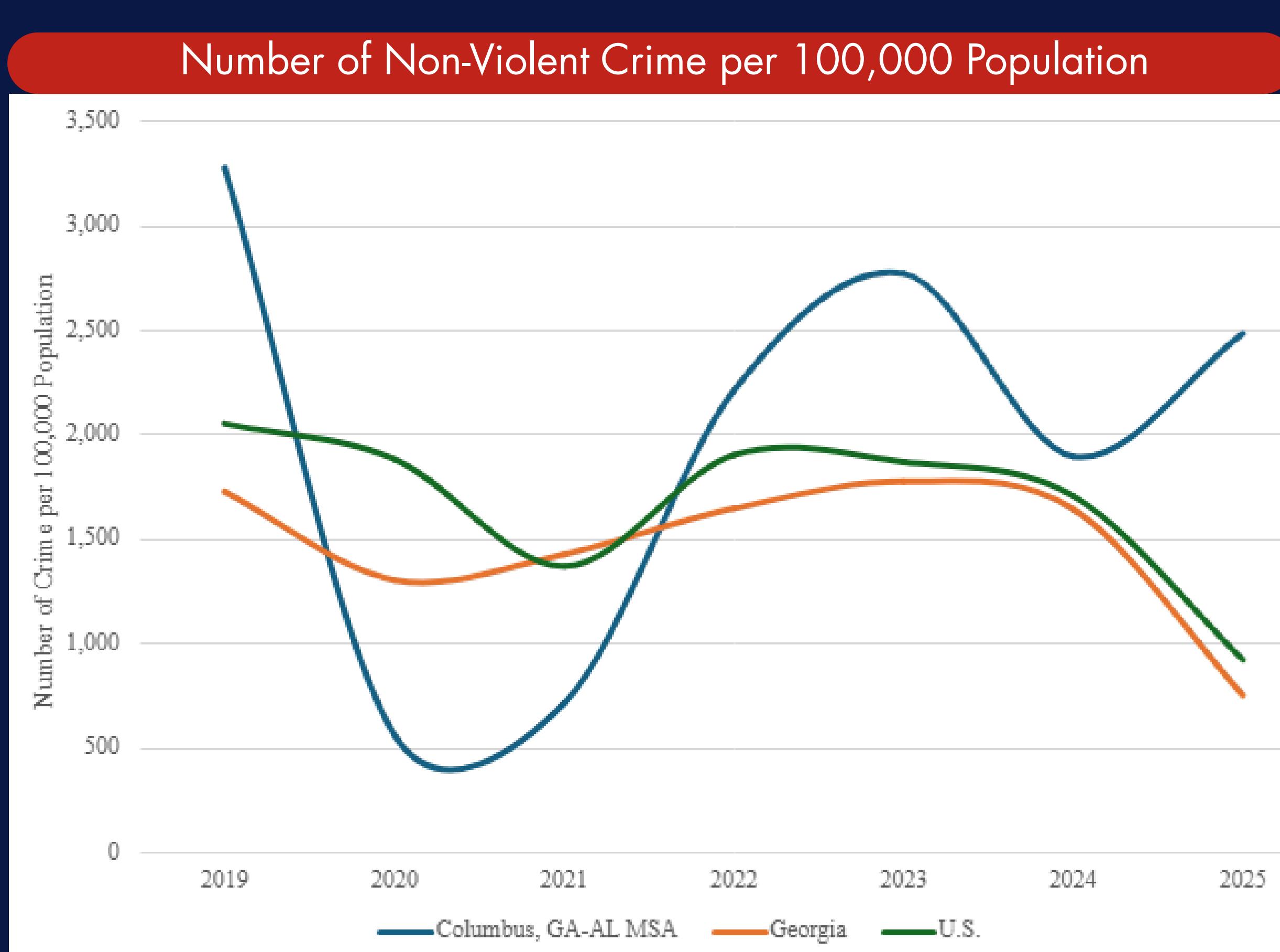
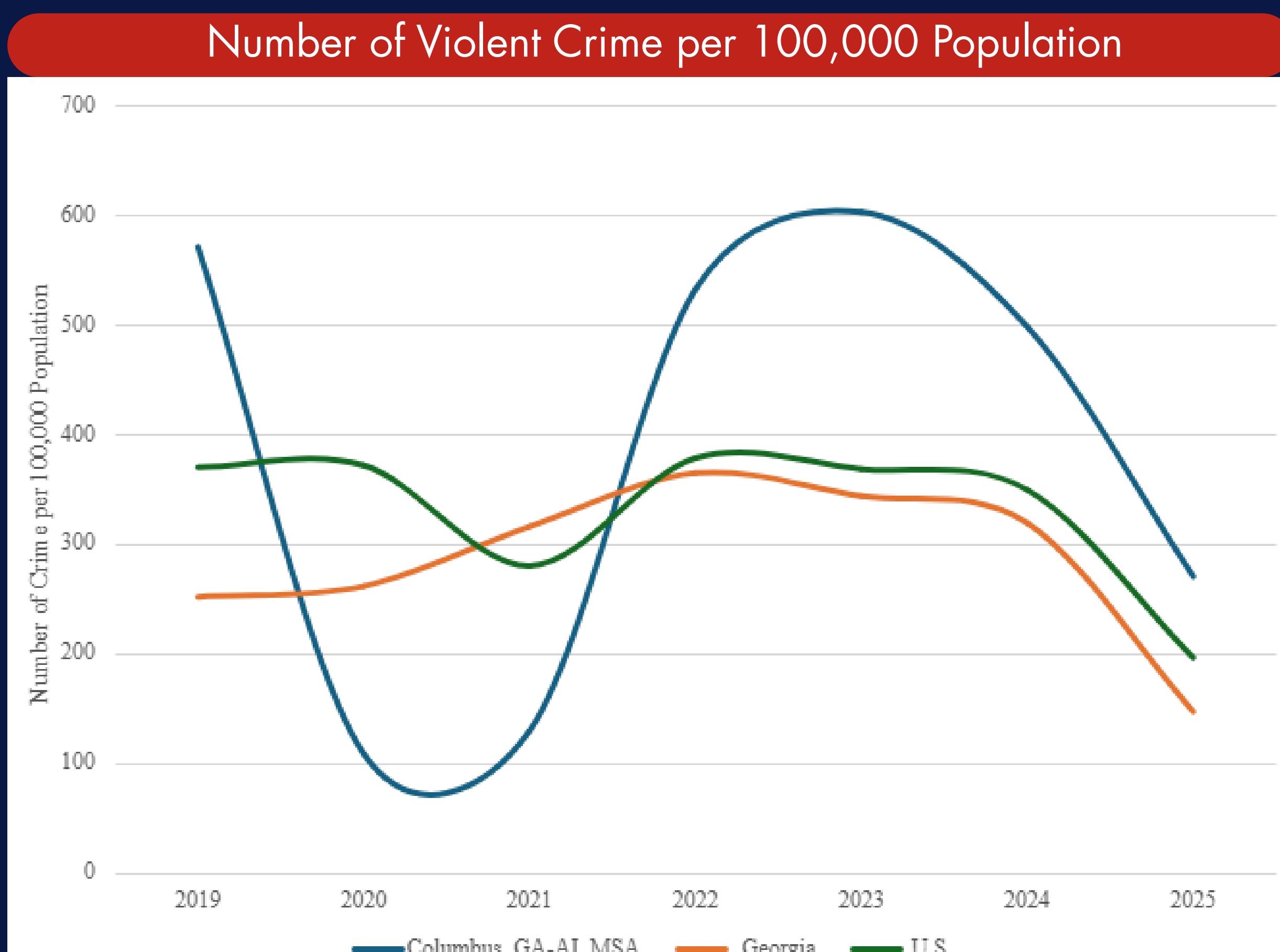




The number of new monthly listings has remained relatively stable, with some volatility over the past three years, averaging 300-340 listings per month. The median days on market has increased slightly, rising to 55 days in September, up from 48 days in the same month last year. Historically, median days on market in the Columbus, GA-AL reached a record high of 111 days in January 2017 and a record low of 19 days in May 2021.

CRIME AND PUBLIC SAFETY

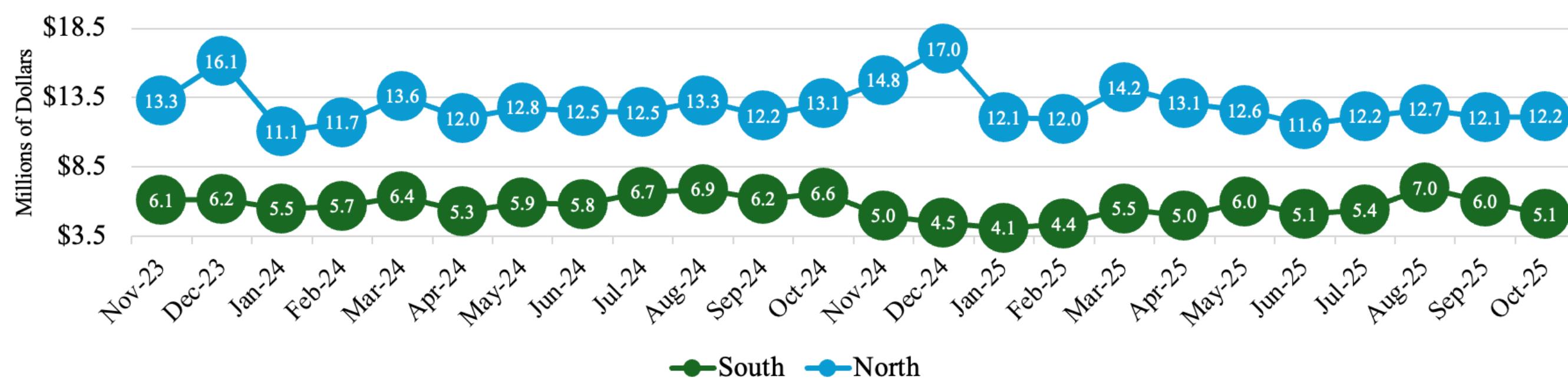
Although both violent and nonviolent crime in Columbus have declined from their peak in 2023, crime rates remain higher than those of Georgia and the United States. This trend signals the need for policymakers to address public safety in order to attract investment, strengthen rule-of-law institutions, and support sustainable economic growth.



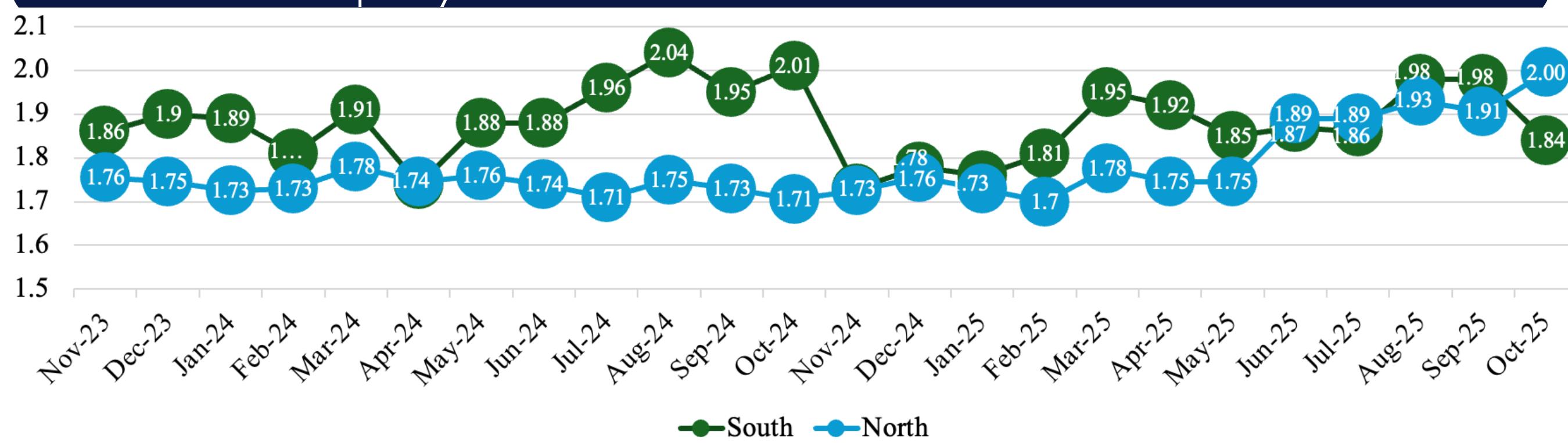
CONSUMER SPENDING

WALMART

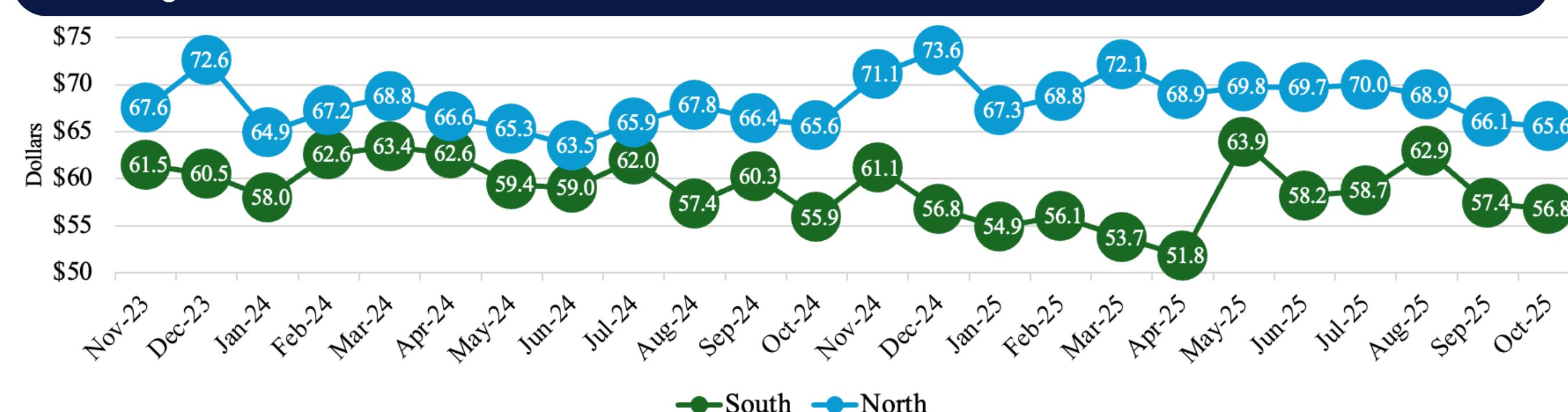
Average Monthly Sale - Walmart



Customer Visit Frequency - Walmart



Average Ticket Sale - Walmart



Note: Data for Walmart retail activity on the north and south sides of Columbus were collected exclusively from supercenter locations to ensure comparability across sites. The south side analysis is based on transactions from Walmart Supercenter – Victory Drive. The north side analysis reflects the average activity across two locations: Walmart Supercenter – Whittlesey Boulevard and Walmart Supercenter – Gateway Road.

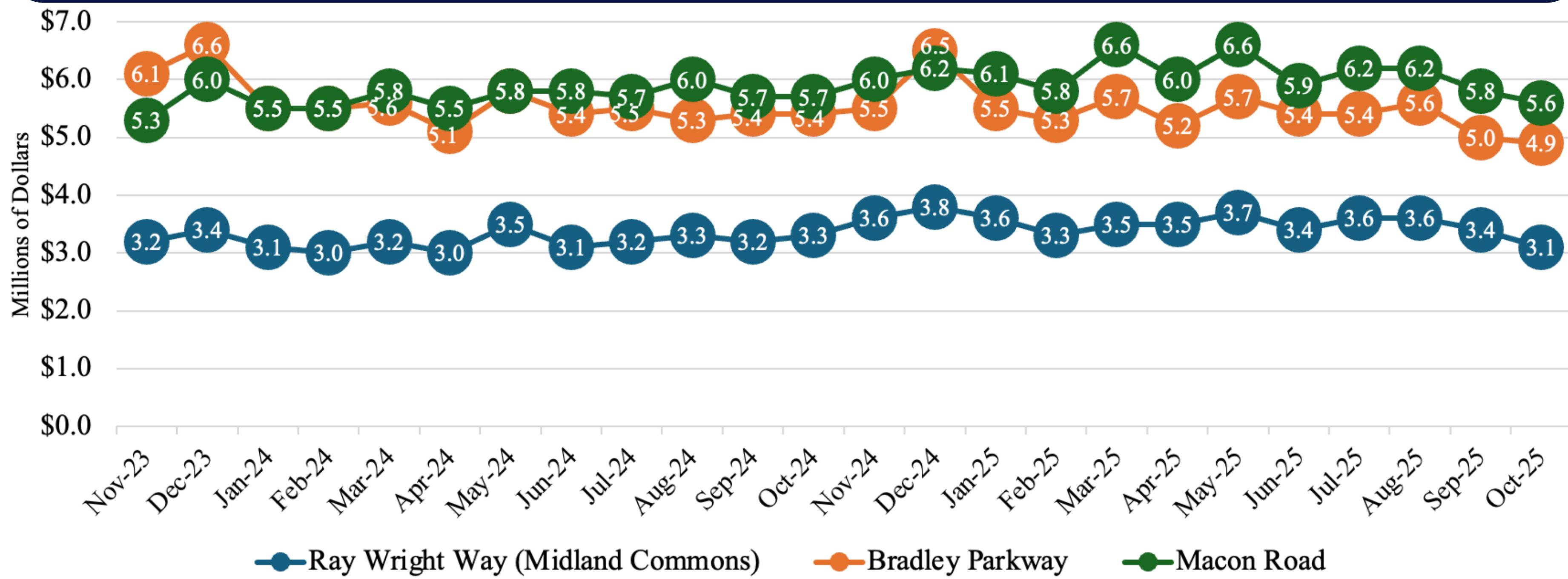
The retail sales figures presented in this analysis are derived from credit and debit card transactions at physical store locations and exclude online purchases, representing a limitation of the data. However, the consistency of the data across 2024 and 2025 provides meaningful insight into overall consumer health.

The results indicate that retail sales on the north side of Columbus substantially exceed those on the south side. Despite an average inflation rate of 2.8 percent in 2025, retail activity remained weak throughout the year, with average monthly Walmart sales in 2025 falling below 2024 levels in both north and south Columbus locations.

Income disparities between north and south Columbus are reflected in average transaction values, which are significantly higher on the north side. Moreover, consumers on the south side, who are less able to afford higher-ticket purchases, made more frequent store visits, suggesting greater financial strain and a more stressed consumer environment in that area.



Average Monthly Sale - Publix

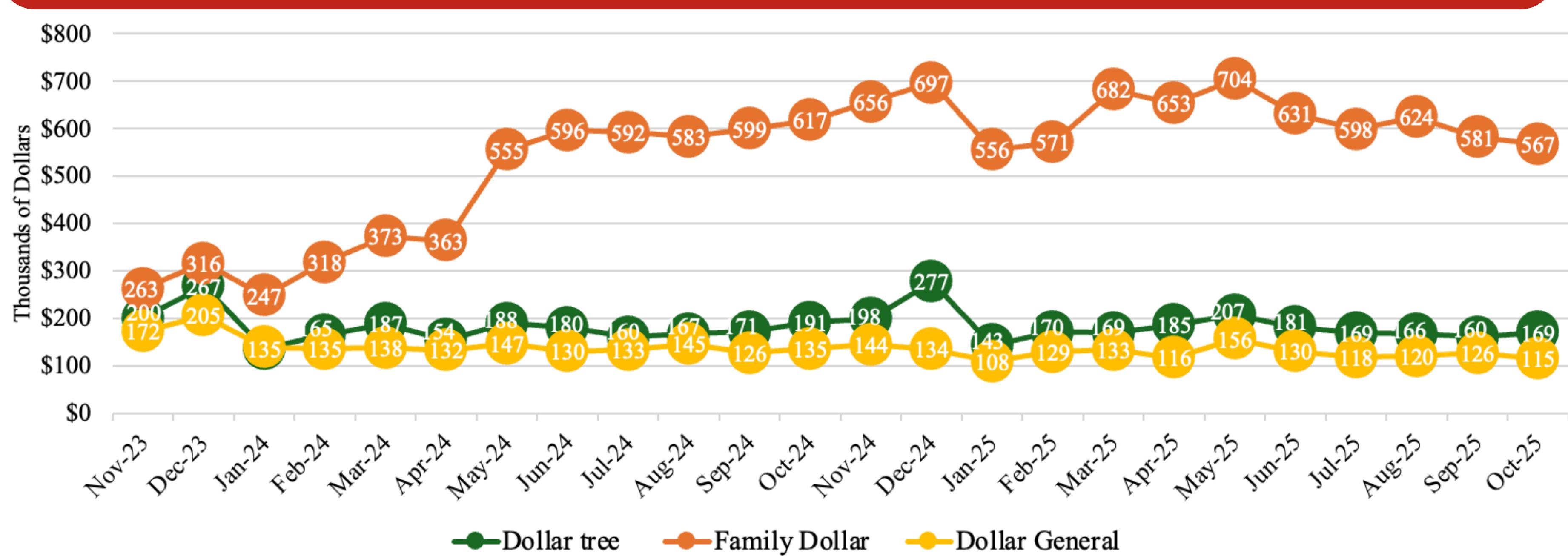


In contrast, higher-income consumers exhibit a healthier outlook, as the data show a consistent, modest increase in Publix sales across all locations, broadly comparable to the rate of inflation.

DISCOUNT RETAILERS



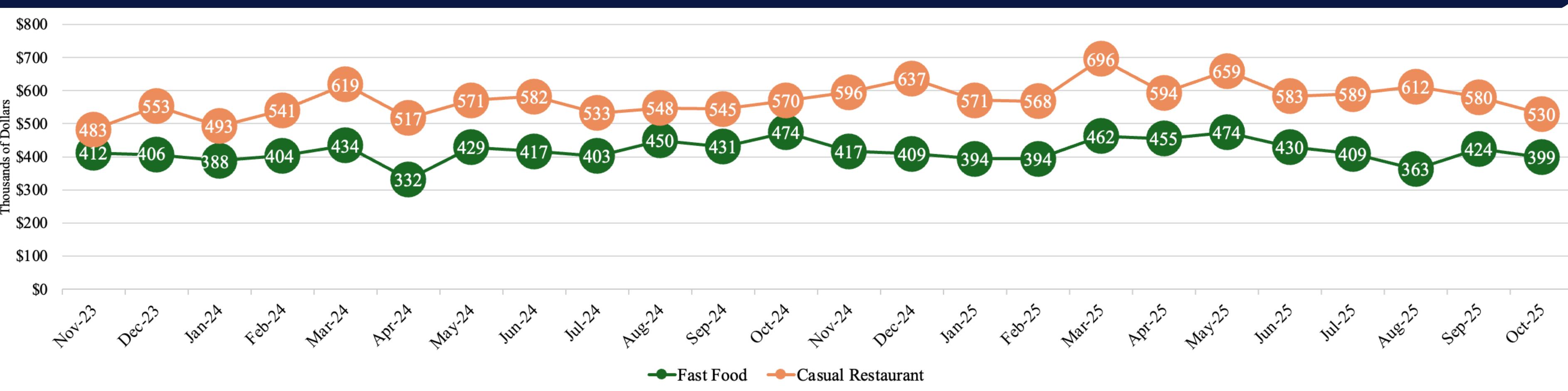
Average Monthly Sale - Discount Retailers



Discount retailers present a consistent picture of financial pressure among lower-income consumers, with average store sales in 2025 falling modestly below 2024 levels despite inflation.

FAST FOOD VS CASUAL RETAURANTS

Average Monthly Sale



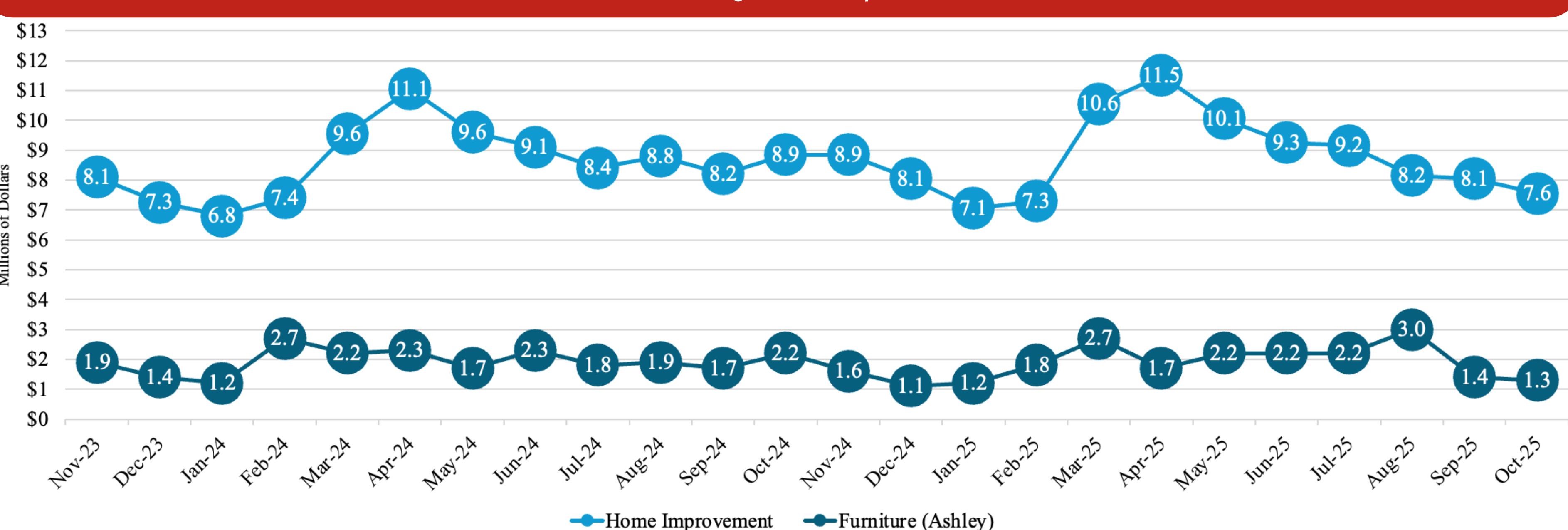
Casual dining exhibits stronger consumption in 2025, exceeding 2024 levels, while fast-food consumption declined in the second half of 2025 relative to 2024. This divergence may reflect intensifying competition within the fast-food sector, which has led restaurants to rely more heavily on aggressive discounting.

Note: Data for Dollar General were calculated as the average of the Buena Vista Rd store (South Columbus) and the Veteran Pkwy store (North Columbus). Data for Dollar Tree were calculated as the average of the Melrich Ave store (South Columbus) and the Veteran Pkwy store (North Columbus).

- Fast food: Data were collected and then calculated as the average of McDonald's, Chick-fil-A, Burger King, Wendy's, and Zaxby's.
- Casual dining: Data were collected and then calculated as the average of Olive Garden, Chili's, Buffalo Wild Wings, Outback Steakhouse, and Texas Roadhouse.

HOME IMPROVEMENT VS FURNITURE

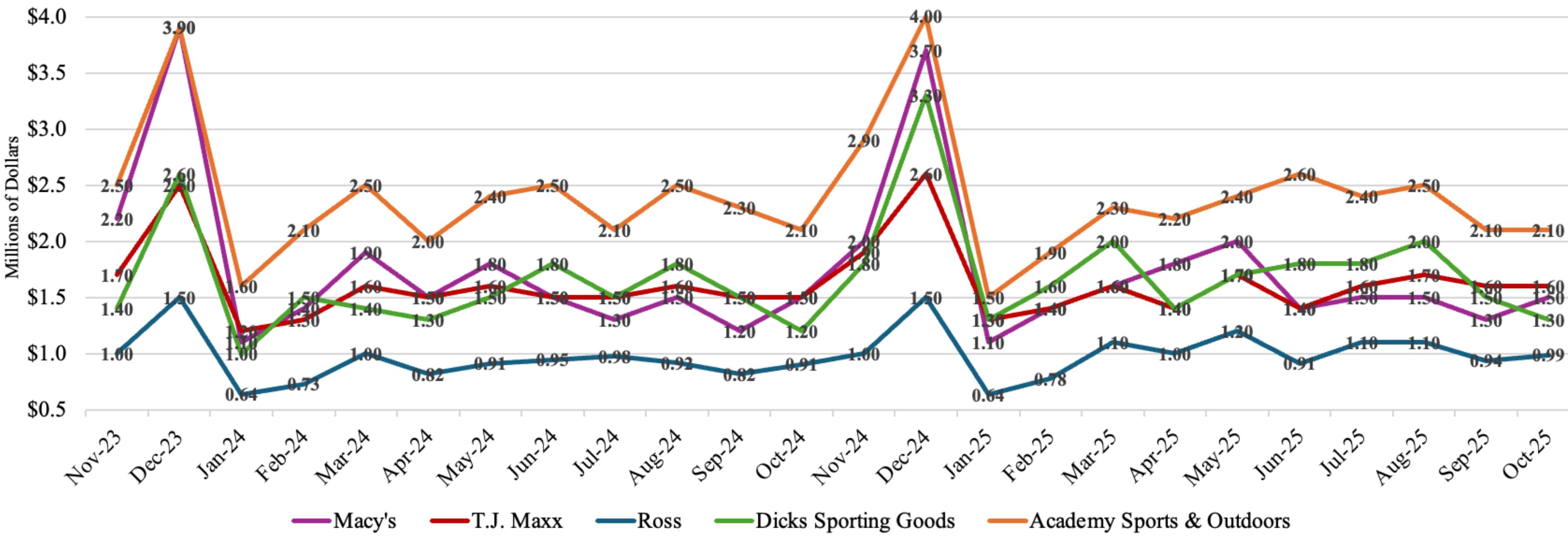
Average Monthly Sale



Home improvement and furniture sales show a stable trend, with higher levels in 2025 compared to 2024 despite short-term fluctuations, reflecting continued strength in the housing market and renovation activity.

APPAREL

Average Monthly Sale



Despite seasonal fluctuations, apparel sales reflect healthy consumer spending, as 2025 sales exceed or remain comparable to 2024 levels.

DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS AND ECONOMIC INITIATIVES IN COLUMBUS, GEORGIA (2024–2025)

Columbus, Georgia is undergoing a period of significant transformation driven by coordinated public and private investments in workforce development, infrastructure, education, industrial expansion, and cultural preservation. From the development of workforce hubs serving veterans and the broader community, to major airport and public safety infrastructure projects, and from advanced technical training programs to large-scale private-sector investments creating hundreds of jobs, these initiatives collectively strengthen the city's economic foundation and long-term competitiveness. At the same time, continued investment in historic preservation, arts, and community amenities reinforces quality of life and supports sustainable growth. Together, these development efforts reflect a strategic commitment to positioning Columbus as a resilient, inclusive, and economically vibrant regional hub in the Chattahoochee Valley and the broader Southeast.

1. Veterans Education Career Transition Resource Center

The Veterans Education Career Transition Resource Center (VECTR) represents a cornerstone workforce development initiative for the Chattahoochee Valley region. Anchored by Columbus Technical College, the facility will offer career training, accelerated credentialing, job placement support, and veteran services for transitioning service members, veterans, military spouses, and the general public. Located on Fort Benning Road, the center was approximately 25% complete as of mid-October 2025, and is designed as a one-stop hub to streamline military-to-civilian career transitions and expand access to high-demand technical programs.

The VECTR Center is expected to catalyze workforce outcomes in priority sectors for the region and is aligned with broader workforce development strategies that leverage Columbus's proximity to Fort Benning and its veteran-rich labor pool.



2. Judicial & Public Safety Infrastructure

Columbus is advancing major civic infrastructure projects, including a new Columbus Judicial Center — a roughly \$207.5 million, eight-story facility that broke ground in early 2024 with an anticipated completion in late 2026. This center will centralize multiple court functions and support modern judicial operations. In parallel, the City is planning a new 1,600-bed jail facility, with an estimated cost of \$500 million and a projected 4–5 year timeline to become operational. While funding sources remain to be finalized, this project underscores the City Council's focus on public safety and correctional facility modernization.

3. Columbus Airport Modernization & Runway Upgrades

The Columbus Airport (CSG) is undergoing a substantial transformation to expand capacity and enhance aviation services. A \$26 million runway renovation is currently underway, replacing the main asphalt runway with a concrete surface capable of supporting larger aircraft and positioning the airport for future passenger and cargo growth. Commercial flights are temporarily suspended during construction (August–November 2025) as part of this critical upgrade.

In addition, plans for a brand new general aviation terminal — nearly 19,000 square feet — have been approved. This facility will offer enhanced amenities for corporate and charter flights, flight training operations, and military and medical transport services, reflecting strategic investment in Columbus's role as a regional air transportation hub.

Beyond these immediate works, preliminary designs have been unveiled for a future terminal to support long-term airport growth.



4. New Programs in Technical Education

Chattahoochee Technical College is expanding its academic portfolio with a new Airframe and Powerplant (A&P) program after receiving the FAA's Air Agency Certificate. This program will prepare students for FAA certification exams in aircraft maintenance, both for airframes and powerplants, addressing workforce needs in aviation maintenance and related technical fields. The first courses are expected to launch in Columbus by Fall 2026, filling a key skills gap in the regional labor market.



5. Major Industry Investments and Job Creation

Columbus continues to attract significant private investment with strong job creation impacts:

- JS Link America Inc. announced a \$223 million investment to build a rare-earth permanent magnet manufacturing facility at the Muscogee Technology Park, projected to create more than 520 jobs. These magnets are critical components for industries such as electric vehicles, aerospace, robotics, and energy. According to a published economic impact analysis by the Butler Center for Research and Economic Development, the operation of the JS Link America magnet manufacturing facility is projected to support approximately 796 total jobs annually, including direct, indirect, and induced employment. The study estimates \$87.5 million in annual value added to regional GDP, \$212.2 million in total economic output, and \$16.9 million in combined local, state, and federal tax revenues generated each year. These impacts highlight the project's significance not only as a job creator but also as a long-term contributor to regional income, fiscal capacity, and economic growth.
- BioTouch, a global healthcare logistics provider, plans to expand two existing Columbus facilities with a \$12.5 million investment, creating approximately 480 jobs over the next four years.
- J.M. Smucker Co. (Hostess Brands) is investing over \$120 million to expand its production operations in Columbus, adding approximately 48 jobs and reinforcing the city's profile in food manufacturing.

These projects enhance Columbus's industrial ecosystem, diversify job opportunities, and strengthen the integration of education, workforce development, and industry.

6. Cultural and Historic Preservation

Columbus is also investing in arts and culture, recognizing these as drivers of community identity and economic vitality. The Springer Opera House received a \$60,000 grant from the Fox Gives Grant Program for historic preservation under the Forever Springer Project, supporting chiller replacement, window restoration, and lobby door repairs.

Historic buildings such as Union Station have been adaptively redeveloped into mixed-use spaces with apartments, offices, and event facilities, following a roughly \$5 million renovation completed in 2025.



7. Broader Planning and Community Development Initiatives

City planning efforts reflect long-term strategies for quality of life and mobility improvements. These include developing a Safety Action Plan, transportation planning through the metro planning organization, and master planning for the Liberty District to guide future growth and land use.

Community infrastructure projects—such as upgrades to parks, aquatic facilities, and the construction of new pickleball courts—enhance recreational amenities that support residents' well-being and attract visitors.



**“WE SERVE WITH
CARE.”**

Sincerely,



Fady Mansour



The Butler Center for Research
and Economic Development

2025 - 2026

COLUMBUS STATE UNIVERSITY
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