

Ventura County faces a worsening affordability crisis, as the majority of its workforce is not compensated at levels sufficient to meet rising living costs.



PRICED OUT: VENTURA COUNTY WORKERS' COST OF LIVING CRISIS



INTRODUCTION

Ventura County faces a deepening affordability crisis that threatens the stability of its workforce and communities. Rising costs for housing, childcare, food, and other essentials have outpaced wages, leaving many families unable to meet even a modest standard of living. Section 1 of this paper examines housing market trends, showing how rents and home prices have surged dramatically over the past five years, while public sector salaries have grown at less than half the pace. Section 2 expands the analysis beyond housing, detailing how the costs of childcare, food, energy, and other essentials have climbed sharply in recent years. As a result, the majority of workers who serve the county cannot afford to live securely within it, with many reporting being housing insecure, severely rent-burdened, at high debt risk, or requiring public assistance. This paper examines the widening gap between earnings and costs in Ventura County and highlights the urgent need for workers to be paid enough to live in the communities they support.

KEY FINDINGS

- According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC), a Ventura County household must earn **\$50.31 per hour** in 2025 to afford the average 2-bedroom rent without being cost burdened, a threshold only **10% of SEIU L721** membership reaches, meaning **90%** are rent-burdened under current salaries in today's housing market.
- Homeownership costs skyrocket out of reach for County employees – single family homes are nearly **40% more expensive** than five years ago.ⁱ Assuming a down payment of 20%, a household would now need an **annual income of \$227,861** to purchase at current price and interest rates—almost double the amount required in 2020.
- Median rents in Ventura County have grown 3.7% year-over-year, **the fastest in Southern California**. Also, median rents have increased 34.8% over the last five years.
- **36% of SEIU L721 report they would risk homelessness if they missed a paycheck.**
- According to the Economic Policy Institute, to maintain a 'modest yet adequate' living, a household of 2 adults, 2 children would need to earn \$170,000, a threshold only 0.5% of Ventura County SEIU 721 members earn on a single income, and only **21%** earn with a dual income household.
- The cost of other non-housing essentials has significantly outpaced salary increases, some almost three-fold, such as electricity (55%), compared to COLA increases (20%).

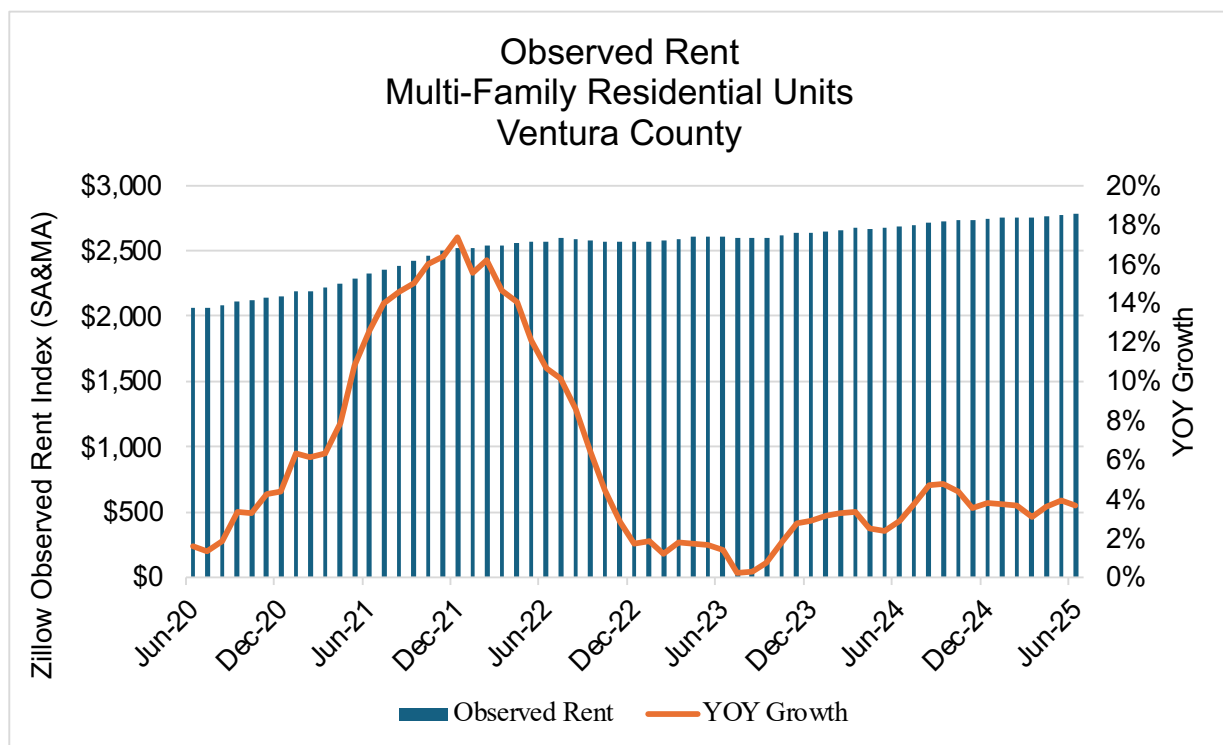
SECTION 1: HOUSING MARKET & AFFORDABILITY TRENDS IN VENTURA COUNTY

The analysis finds that nearly all of SEIU L721 members who work for Ventura County also live within county boundaries. In fact, more than nine out of ten members reside locally, which means long-distance commuting is not a widespread concern.ⁱⁱ The primary challenge facing SEIU L721 members is not commuting but housing affordability."

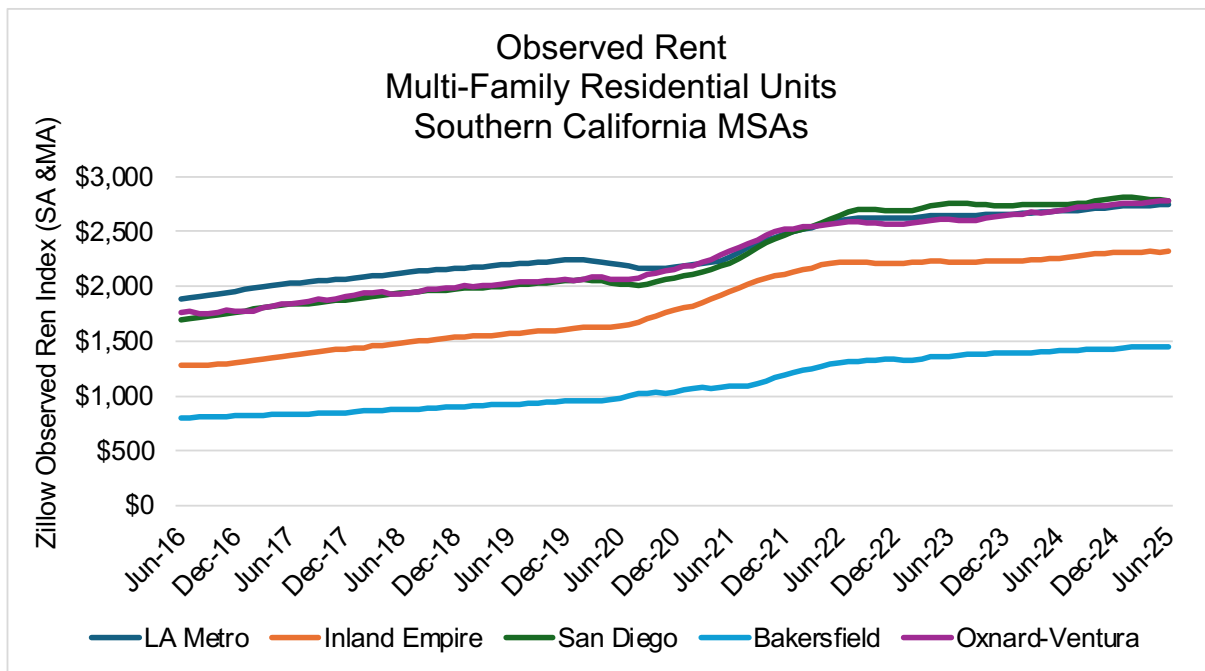
Rental Market Pressures

Rental costs in Ventura County have reached levels that are increasingly difficult for working families to manage. According to Zillow's Observed Rent Index (ZORI), the median rent in June 2025 was \$2,783, slightly higher than both the Los Angeles Metro and San Diego markets. Rents grew 3.7% year-over-year, the fastest pace in Southern California, and have increased 34.8% over the last five years.ⁱⁱⁱ

The mismatch between wages and housing costs is stark. The National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) estimates that a Ventura County household must earn \$50.31 per hour in 2025 to afford the average 2-bedroom rent without being cost burdened.



Source: Zillow Group, Analysis by SEIU 721



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By contrast, SEIU L721 members' median hourly pay is \$32.94 or \$68,406 annually when full-time and part-time status is taken into account. This is the equivalent of \$5,700 per month. Under federal guidelines, rent should not exceed 30% of income—or \$1,710 per month for SEIU L721 members.

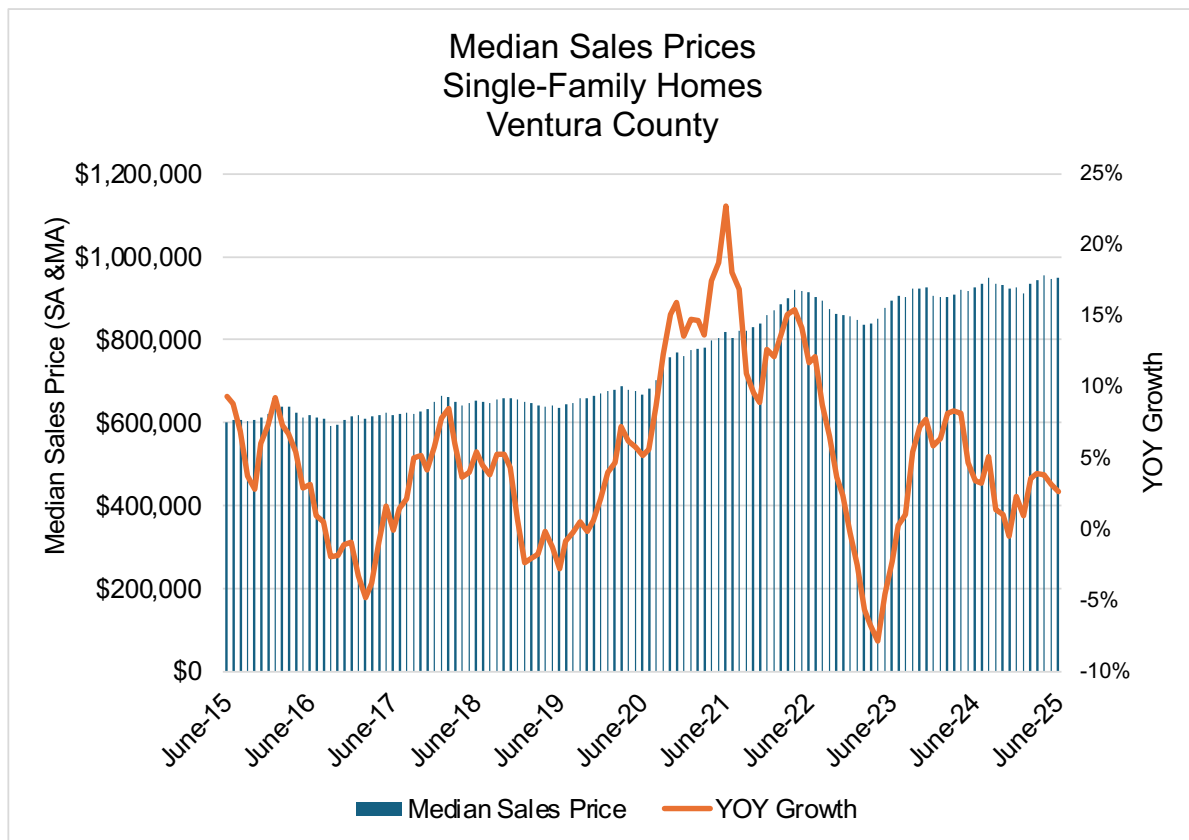
Put simply: only 10% of SEIU L721 members earn enough to meet the NLIHC housing wage threshold, underscoring how out of step market rents have become with public sector wages.

Homeownership Out of Reach

Single-family home prices are even further out of reach. The California Association of Realtors reports that the median sales price for a single-family home in Ventura County was \$975,000 in June 2025. While price growth has slowed, homes remain nearly 40% more expensive than five years ago.^{iv} A household would now need an annual income of \$227,861 to purchase at current price and interest rates—almost double the amount required in 2020.

Assessed Values and Local Fiscal Trends

Rising housing costs have also translated into rapidly growing assessed values. County assessor data shows that total assessed value in Ventura County grew from \$141.2 billion in FY 2019–20 to \$187.0 billion in FY 2025–26—a 32.5% increase in just six years (see attached chart).^v While this expansion has boosted the property tax base, it has not translated into greater affordability for working families. Instead, it highlights how wealth accumulation through real estate has outpaced wage growth, deepening inequality between homeowners and renters.



Source: CA Association of Realtors, Analysis by SEIU 721

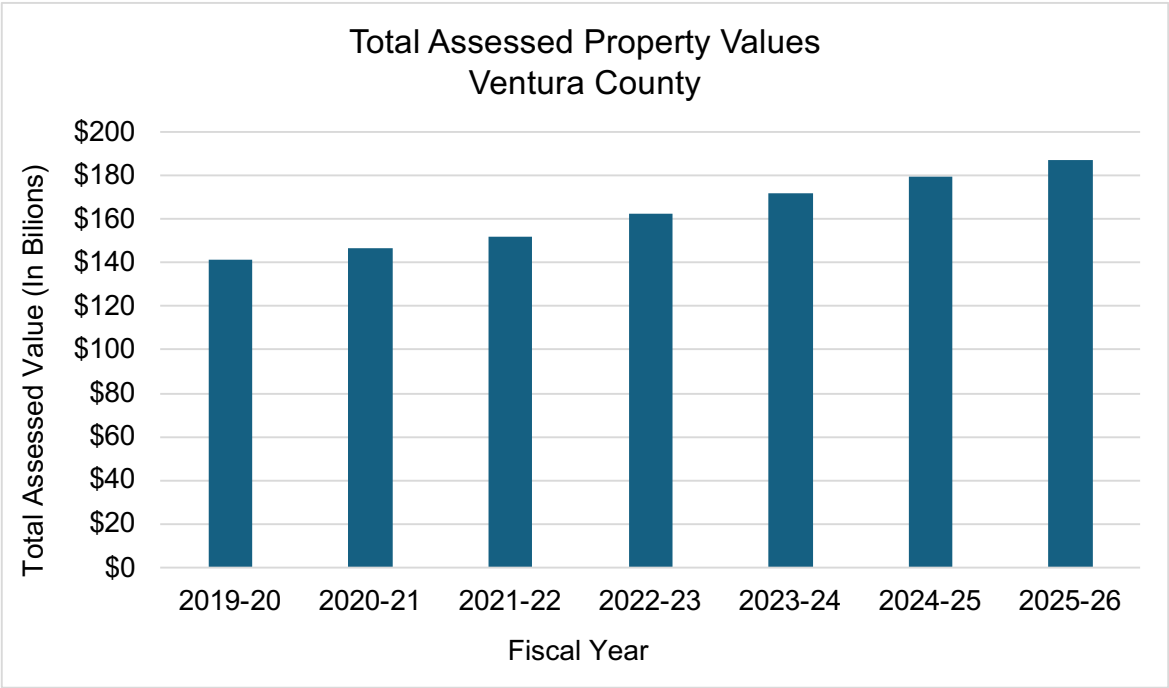
Existing Single-Family Home Prices (Non-Seasonally Adjusted)

County	Jun-25	YOY Growth	Previous Year Growth	Five Year Growth
Orange	\$1,470,000	1.4%	15.1%	69.0%
Santa Barbara	\$1,222,500	-9.8%	13.2%	82.0%
San Diego	\$1,025,000	-2.8%	10.0%	51.2%
Ventura	\$975,000	1.1%	4.0%	39.3%
Los Angeles	\$903,650	1.6%	6.8%	45.9%
San Luis Obispo	\$880,000	-1.1%	2.9%	36.3%
Riverside	\$635,000	-0.5%	1.6%	41.1%
San Bernardino	\$482,460	-1.6%	4.3%	48.4%

Source: CA Association of Realtors, Analysis by SEIU 721

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Source: Ventura County Assessor’s Office, Analysis by SEIU 721

Member Living Situations

Internal bargaining survey data underscores the pressures members face:

- Just 42% own their home.
- 36% report they would risk homelessness if they missed a paycheck.
- 54% pay more than 30% of their income toward rent or mortgage.
- 6% have a family member currently unhoused.
- 9% rely on public assistance, and 14% rely on Social Security income.^{vi}

These results demonstrate how deeply cost burdens are affecting members’ day-to-day stability, with many one paycheck away from housing insecurity.

Section 1 Summary & Conclusion

Taken together, these findings show that SEIU L721 members face significant and worsening barriers to securing affordable housing in Ventura County. Both the rental and ownership markets are increasingly out of step with Ventura County public sector wages. Assessed values and property wealth continue to rise sharply, yet fewer than one in ten members earn enough to meet the NLIHC housing wage standard. SEIU L721 member survey data makes clear that these conditions are not abstract—they are lived realities pushing many into high rent burden, housing insecurity, and in some cases, homelessness.

SECTION 2: OTHER COST OF LIVING FACTORS IN VENTURA COUNTY

Overview – Ventura County Affordability

Ventura County has a high cost of living relative to its median family income. Of all the 58 counties throughout California, Ventura County has the 8th highest cost of living, yet the median family income is the 13th highest. When evaluating its relative cost of living to median income, the county ranks 21st in the state.^{vii}

According to the Economic Policy Institute's 2025 calculations for what a family, comprising of two adults and two children, needs in order to attain a 'modest yet adequate standard of living' in Ventura County is \$170,791, broken down by the following categories:

- Housing: \$2,414 per month • \$28,968/year
- Food: \$1,095 per month • \$13,140/year
- Childcare: \$3,472 per month • \$41,663/year
 - Monthly costs range from \$1,443 for a single-child family to \$4,096 for a family with four kids. Includes caregiving costs and other associated costs with caring for children (of all ages) in the home.
- Transportation: \$1,729 per month • \$20,749/year
- Health care: \$1,685 per month • \$20,219/year
- Other necessities: \$1,181 per month • \$14,167/year
- Taxes: \$2,657 per month • \$31,884/year

In Ventura County's job posting marketing materials used for recruitment, the County touts that "Ventura County is a wonderful place to raise a family..." – but is this reality? ^{viii}

How do SEIU L721 members stack up to this ‘modest yet adequate’ (\$170,791 per household, EPI) standard of living for Ventura County?

\$68,406 = Ventura County’s SEIU L721 members’ median wage

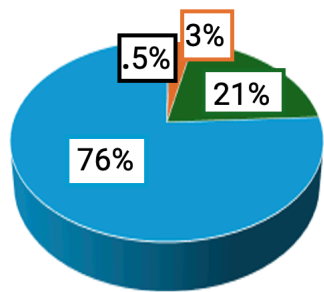
Sample Household Snapshots for SEIU L721 members

Sample Household 1: Client Benefits Specialist I \$52K + Medical Assistant II \$58K = \$110,000 annual = \$60,000 short for a ‘modest yet adequate’ living. To make ends meet, families could double up on housing or live far and commute. Families may delay seeking medical treatment for fear of costs. There’s a higher likelihood of incurring debt in emergencies (e.g. car breaks down, family illness/death). Potential savings for education or retirement are challenging. Employees may seek additional employment.

Sample Household 2: Client Benefits Specialist II: \$59,000 (single parent – 25% of homes in Ventura County^{ix} – \$59,000 annually = \$100,000 short (costs estimates are slightly lower in one adult household). These families make challenging choices to cut costs with the income earned at an average county job. Second jobs or income streams may be necessary to not severely struggle as these families are highly rent burdened, unable to save for retirement, education for children, or have a budget for emergencies.

How do County of Ventura SEIU L721 members overall stack up to this ‘modest yet adequate’ standard of living?

- At current 2025 pay rates, less than 0.5% (.045) of represented Ventura County SEIU L721 workforce could support 2 children on a single-family income.



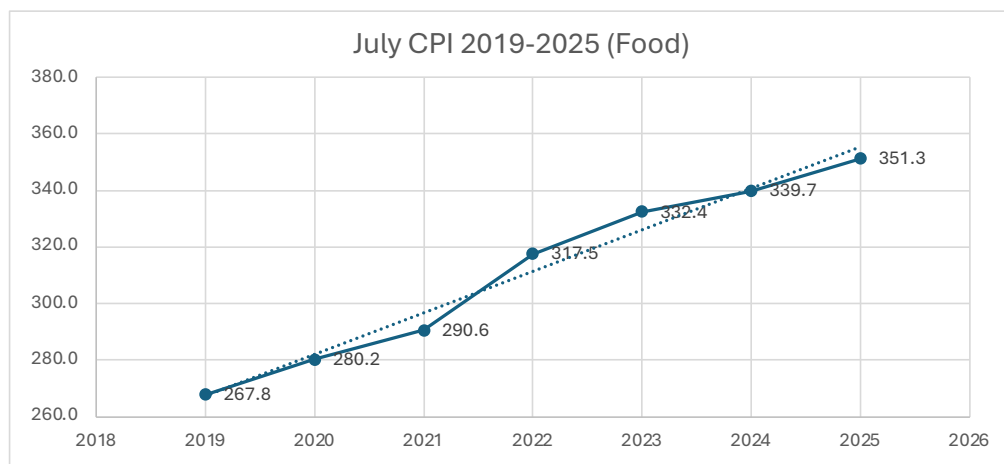
- Only 3% of Ventura County SEIU L721 members could afford to live on 2025 wages in a 2-parent household where one parent works and the other handles childcare.
- Only 21% of the Ventura County SEIU L721 workforce can afford to live on 2025 salaries if both parents work full time.
- The remaining 76% of the Ventura County SEIU L721 workforce, even if both parents are working full time, are unable to afford to live a ‘modest, adequate’ standard of living for the cost of living in 2025 in Ventura County, according to current estimates supported by EPI.^x

Cost of Living Changes Longitudinally

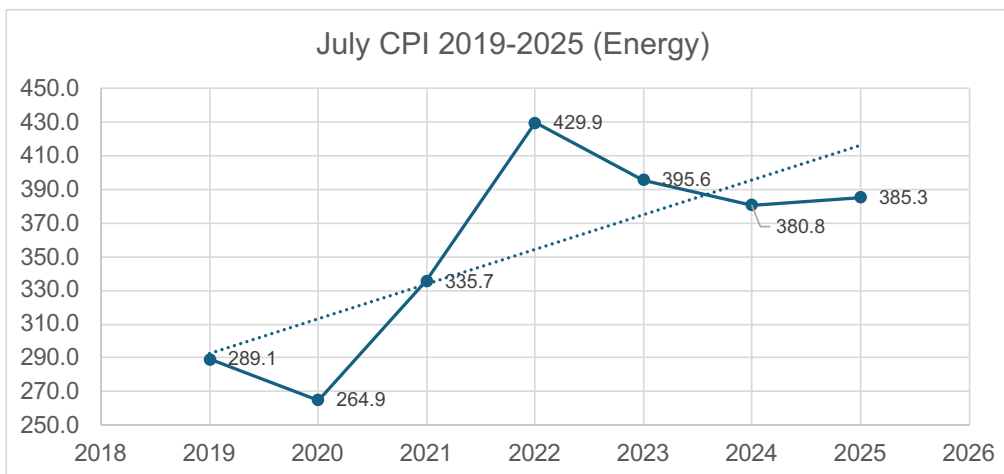
As discussed in Section 1, housing is not the only major costly essential that has had a disproportionate increase in the last five years relative to salaries. Increases in costs for other items contributing to the unaffordable rise in the cost of living in Ventura County includes:

- Food: Groceries & Eating Out
- Energy: Gas & Utilities
- Services: Personal, Recreational, & Transportation
- Tuition, school fees, childcare

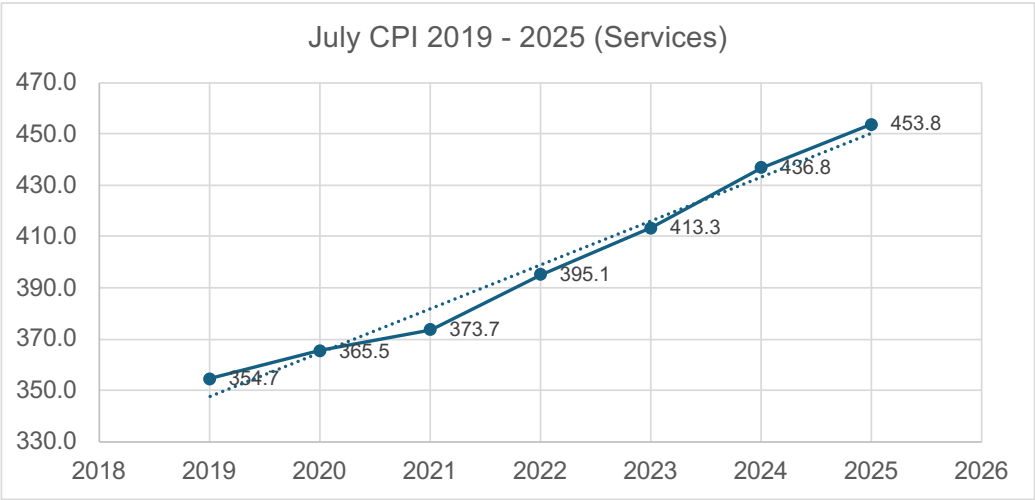
For the purposes of this longitudinal analysis, we'll use Los Angeles Region Consumer Price Index (CPI) as a proxy (LA region CPI index is the closest region that BLS tracks to Ventura County) for the region's cost of living changes from 2019-2025. ^{xi}



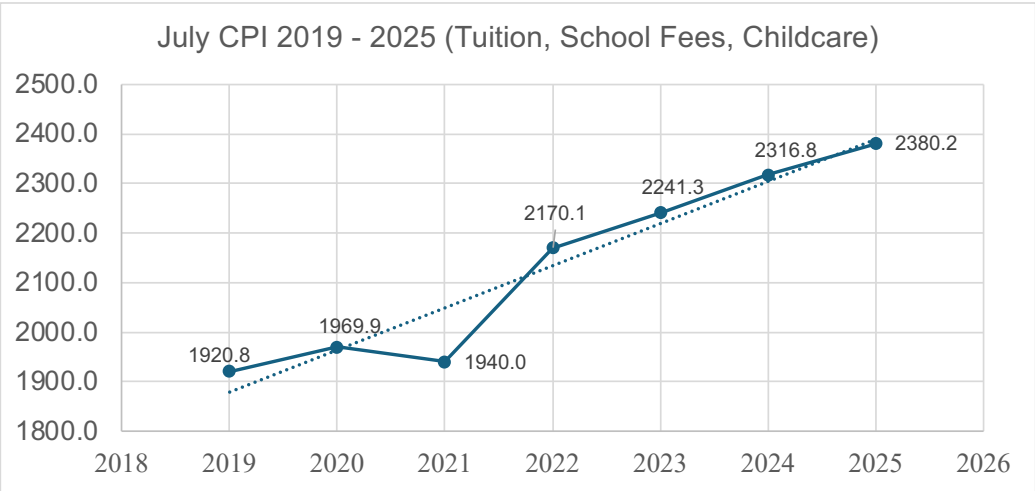
Food (all) Prices went up 41.7% over the last six years, or an average of 6.95% per year.



Energy (Gas + Household Electricity + Fuel) Prices went up 55% over the last six years, or an average of 9.2% per year.



Services (Transportation, Recreation, Personal Services, all not categorized as a tangible good) prices went up 27.9% over the last six years, or an average of 4.6% per year.



Tuition, School Fees, Childcare Prices went up 24% over the last six years, or an average of 4% per year.

Conclusion

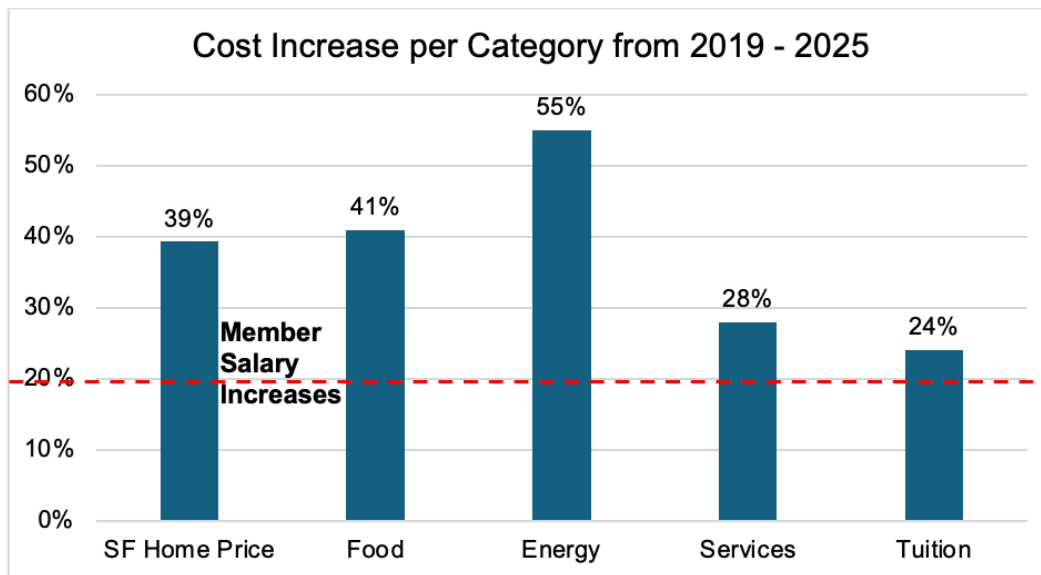
From 2019 to 2025, SEIU L721 members salaries have not increased at the same rate as the increased rate of Ventura County’s cost of living. Ventura County SEIU L721 members’ Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA)s across the board salary increases have increased approximately 20% from 2019-2025^{xiii}, or 3.3% average annually, which has not measured up to the increased costs of living and purchasing necessities from the same period (2019-2025). For example:

- The cost of Housing in Ventura County has increased (2020-2025)
 - Single family home prices have increased by 39.5%
 - Median rent has increased by 34.8%^{xiv}

- The cost of Food has increased by 41%.
- The cost of Energy has increased by 55%.
- The cost of Services has increased by 27.9%
- The cost of Tuition, other school fees, and childcare has increased by 24%.

Based on this analysis, the overwhelming majority of the current workforce of the County of Ventura are not being appropriately compensated to keep up with the increasing costs of living in the County of Ventura.

Pay workers enough to live in the county they serve.



SF= Single Family

ⁱCalifornia Association of REALTORS®. (2025). Data & statistics. Retrieved August 18, 2025, from <https://www.car.org/marketdata/data>

ⁱⁱService Employees International Union. (2025). [Unpublished Excel data file]. Internal dataset.

ⁱⁱⁱ Zillow. (n.d.). Housing data. Zillow Research. Retrieved August 13, 2025, from <https://www.zillow.com/research/data/>

^{iv} California Association of REALTORS®. (n.d.). Data & statistics. Retrieved August 17, 2025, from <https://www.car.org/marketdata/data>

^vVentura County Assessor. (n.d.). Roll data. Ventura County Assessor. Retrieved August 12, 2025, from <https://assessor.venturacounty.gov/assessor-data/roll-data/>

^{vi} Service Employees International Union. (2024, August 16). Ventura County bargaining survey results 8-16-24 [Unpublished Excel data file]. Internal dataset.

□□□ Economic Policy Institute. 2025. Family Budget Fact Sheet: Ventura County. Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute. Accessed August 26, 2025. <https://www.epi.org/resources/budget/budget-factsheets/>

^{viii} County of Ventura. (n.d.). Brochure – Chief Deputy Director EA [PDF]. Ventura County Human Resources. Retrieved September 18, 2025, from https://vcportal.ventura.org/HR/joblisting/Brochure-Chief_Deputy_Director_EA.pdf

^{ix} U.S. Census Bureau. (2024). Single-Parent Households with Children as a Percentage of Households with Children (5-Year Estimate) in Ventura County, CA [ACS, Table S1101]. Retrieved September 18, 2025, from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis: <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/S1101SPHOUSE006111>

^x Ventura County. (2024). Data provided to SEIU 721 in the RFI process [Unpublished dataset]. Internal document.

^{xi} U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2025). Consumer Price Index. U.S. Department of Labor. Retrieved August 28, 2025, from https://www.bls.gov/regions/west/news-release/consumerpriceindex_losangeles.htm

^{xii} Data from preceding 4 graphs sourced from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2025). Consumer Price Index. U.S. Department of Labor. Retrieved August 28, 2025, from https://www.bls.gov/regions/west/news-release/consumerpriceindex_losangeles.htm

^{xiii} Ventura County and Service Employees International Union. Memorandum of Understanding 2019-2022. And Ventura County and Service Employees International Union. Memorandum of Understanding 2022-2025.

^{xiv} Zillow. (n.d.). Zillow observed rent index (ZORI) [Data set]. Zillow Research. Retrieved August 2025, from <https://www.zillow.com/research/data/>



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