

Still working for too little in Columbus

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All work should pay enough to live a good life. All working people should be paid enough to provide for their families, no matter their race or gender, the kind of job they do, or where they live and work. For years, too many of greater Columbus's most common jobs paid so little the typical worker would qualify for — and likely rely on — food aid to feed a family of three. By May 2022, the number of greater Columbus's 10 most common jobs paying the median worker so little was four, the same as in 2019.

New statewide data show that 1) wages overall and in a majority of the state's most common occupations grew since 2019, and 2) some of the lowest-paying common jobs have been displaced in the top 10 by better-paying ones. Similarly, Columbus's mix of most common occupations has shifted toward higher-paid positions since 2019 before COVID-19. The Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) has experienced wage growth in seven of those jobs, compared with five for the state, but not enough to lift most workers in them out of economic precarity. These data are from Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics gathered over a three-year survey and using a model to estimate wages for 2022.

Jobs restored to Columbus

A full recovery must include all Ohio communities. With 1,156,800 people working as of May 2023, the Columbus metro area had recovered all jobs lost to COVID-19 and added 31,700 jobs as compared with February 2020, making it one of three metropolitan areas in Ohio where jobs had fully recovered. These data are from the monthly Current Employment Statistics survey gathered by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and released with the unemployment rate.

Rising pay, but still too low for too many

From 2019 to 2022, wages rose overall by 6.4% for the typical (median) Columbus MSA worker, accounting for all jobs. Among the Columbus area's 10 most common jobs, wages rose in seven. The number of jobs in the 10 biggest occupations that still paid so little that the middle worker would qualify for, and likely need, food aid to feed a family of three remained at four in 2022, the same as in 2019. Wages below 130% of the poverty level, \$29,939 in 2022, meet that threshold. Just three occupations paid enough for financial security: a wage at least 200% of the poverty level (\$46,060).

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Pay growth recovered lost ground in most common Columbus MSA jobs

Top 10 occupations 2022	Job growth			Pay growth			Pay level	
	2022 rank	2022 jobs	Change in jobs since 2019	2022 median hourly pay	Pay change since 2019	Percent pay change since 2019	2022 median annual pay	2022 pay as a share of poverty
Stockers and Order Fillers	1	36,500	17,220	\$18.56	\$3.13	20.3%	\$38,600	168%
Fast Food and Counter Workers	2	26,880	-6,430	\$12.96	\$2.52	24.1%	\$26,970	117%
Customer Service Reps	3	26,300	-4,990	\$19.00	-\$0.49	-2.5%	\$39,510	172%
General and Operations Managers	4	24,670	11,720	\$47.10	-\$6.80	-12.6%	\$97,960	425%
Registered Nurses	5	24,430	-2,260	\$37.94	-\$1.12	-2.9%	\$78,920	343%
Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand	6	23,950	-4,110	\$17.30	\$1.24	7.7%	\$35,980	156%
Retail Salespersons	7	22,670	-4,860	\$14.08	\$1.59	12.8%	\$29,290	127%
Home Health and Personal Care Aides	8	22,020	-1,790	\$13.28	\$1.04	8.5%	\$27,620	120%
Cashiers	9	20,770	2,400	\$12.84	\$0.63	5.1%	\$26,710	116%
Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	10	18,730	5,350	\$26.25	\$0.40	1.5%	\$54,600	237%

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS) Survey, May 2019, and May 2022. Estimates, available at <https://www.bls.gov/oes/tables.htm>, updated April 24, 2023. Largest detail occupations in Ohio by employment. Median annual pay shown as a share of the poverty threshold for a family of three in 2022 (\$23,030). The gross monthly income threshold for food assistance is 130% of poverty (\$29,939) or less. Note that BLS implemented a change to the data classification methodology between 2019 and 2022. See Bureau of Labor Statistics, Survey Methods and Reliability Statement for MB3 Research Estimates of the Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics Survey. We have used the updated MB3 method. Wages in red are less than 130% of the poverty level for a family of three. Figures in orange represent a decrease in either jobs or pay.

Wages at all jobs should cover the basics, so people and their families can thrive. While fewer working Columbus residents are struggling on the brink of poverty, many jobs still pay too little for financial security. Policymakers must step up to ensure that every Columbus area and Ohio job is a good job that enables the worker to thrive.