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Job growth strong in February, new survey data show More improvement needed to overcome weak 2012

Ohio added 16,100 jobs in February, according to new data released today by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services. This is good news, but will need to be repeated to get the job market back on track. The data come from the establishment survey, which provides the job count by surveying firms.

Earlier this month, ODJFS released its annual revision of data from the establishment survey. This year's extensive revisions showed that 2012 had the slowest rate of job growth since the end of the recession. Much of this slowdown occurred in the last six months of 2012, during which the state lost 10,500 jobs. Even if the preliminary February gain of 16,100 jobs holds, Ohio's 12-month growth rate stands at a very weak 0.6 percent. Since the official end of the recession Ohio has added 154,000 jobs. It now appears that much of this gain occurred in 2011.

"The first two months of 2013 are an improvement from the second half of 2012," said Hannah Halbert, workforce researcher for Policy Matters Ohio. "But we need several more months of five-figure growth to regain momentum – Ohio is still down 221,000 jobs since the start of the recession."

The changes in the 2012 data are a strong reminder against making too much of the month-to-month changes in the jobs data. Data for the latest month are likely to be revised more than once. This year, the annual benchmarking produced dramatic changes, particularly in job numbers posted after the recession.

The survey of households also released today by ODJFS shows that Ohio's unemployment rate remained steady in February at 7 percent, lower than the national rate of 7.7 percent. The labor force expanded by 1,000, a tiny gain as the state labor force is down more than 34,000 (-0.6 percent) since this time last year. Over the same time period, the U.S. labor force has actually grown by 699,000 (+0.5 percent).

"The U.S. unemployment rate remains higher than the state's, but Ohio appears to be falling behind on other key indicators," Halbert said. "Not only is the U.S. labor force growing, but the nation has posted a 1.5 percent job-growth rate over the last 12 months, compared to Ohio's 0.6 percent increase. We need more gains like February's to regain momentum."

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*Policy Matters Ohio is a nonprofit, nonpartisan state policy research institute
with offices in Cleveland and Columbus.*