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Big Ohio Job Gains in May: A step in the right direction

Ohio added 32,100 jobs in May, according to new data released today by the Ohio Department of Job & Family Services. This is the largest month-to-month gain the state has made since February 1999. It follows a year of practically no job gains.

Monthly numbers are preliminary and today's numbers will likely be revised. Further, the month-to-month jobs data have been particularly volatile with large gains and large losses being reported in successive months. In March, for example, the state lost more than 21,000 jobs, erasing the big gain of 16,200 jobs reported the previous month.

"Today's report is certainly welcome news, but it is unwise to make too much of month-to-month changes," said Hannah Halbert, workforce researcher with Policy Matters Ohio. "Longer-term trends are a more accurate gauge of the state's economic health." Ohio's 12-month increase of 33,200 jobs amounts to a very modest 0.6 percent. May's gain accounts for nearly all of the increase, as only 1,100 jobs were added in the previous 11 months.

Ohio, Nebraska, and South Dakota had the highest rate of job growth among states in May. Each state generated 0.6 percent growth. Ohio's gains were not enough for it to break out of the bottom tier over the past year, a more meaningful period. Ohio and Alabama were tied for having the 10th worst 12-month job growth rate in the nation.

The separate survey of households ODJFS released today also showed some improvement, despite the fact that Ohio's unemployment rate held steady at 7 percent. The household survey showed an increase in the state's labor force, the first monthly gain since February. Overall, the state's labor force is down slightly since May 2012.

"Ohio needs more than 200,000 jobs just to make up for losses in the last recession," Halbert said. "Ohio will need several more months of high growth to decisively break the no-growth trend of the previous year."

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