

*Policy Matters Ohio is a think tank dedicated to creating a more vibrant, equitable, sustainable and inclusive Ohio, through research, strategic communications, coalition building, and policy advocacy. This brief is one of a series that gathers, in concise lists, some of our more practical and viable recommendations on state policy. The series builds on more than a dozen years of research to provide policymakers and advocates with research-based solutions to some of the state's most pressing problems while creating an Ohio economy that works for all.*

### Job creation

**Restore public jobs:** Many Ohioans would like to work but can't find jobs. Our job growth has lagged the nation's since 2005, despite tax cuts sold in the name of increasing employment. Policymakers have slashed public jobs too. Ohio should instead restore the \$607 million we've cut from schools and the \$1.5 billion, all told, that we've eliminated from local communities since FY 2010-11, so that teachers, firefighters, police officers and school nurses can be put back on the job. Learn what we've cut [here](#).

**Invest in infrastructure:** Ohio has huge infrastructure needs: repairing pipes, sewers, bridges, and roads; upgrading our antiquated electric grid; and, cleaning up and improving our parks and communities. A \$300 million investment from the state would replace some of the 215,000 jobs we've lost since the 2005 tax cuts and improve our communities in the process, renovating our aging infrastructure, and generating long-term savings. See our prescription for [federal public jobs](#) here.

**Green our economy:** Ohioans spend more than \$50 billion a year on energy, much of it on polluting fossil fuels imported from out of state. Investing in mass transit, insulation, solar and wind power, and sustainable manufacturing could create jobs, reduce pollution and reduce long-term costs. Ideas [here](#).

### Employee compensation

**Improve the Earned Income Tax Credit:** We applaud Ohio legislators for creating a state EITC to help low-income working families, but among state EITCs ours is among the very weakest. To help more people and help them more, we should [make it refundable](#), make it larger, and get rid of the cap.

**Retain expanded Medicaid:** Kudos to Kasich and others for recognizing that expanding Medicaid to workers earning up to 138 percent of the poverty level will improve lives, create jobs, and bring in federal money. Drop the lawsuit challenging this smart move.

**Raise the minimum wage:** Ohio voters were smart enough to raise our state minimum wage and index it to inflation. But at \$7.95 an hour (starting in 2014), the minimum wage is still too low to boost the economy as much as it should. We could take a cue from California and make a \$10 hourly minimum wage, giving workers more to spend in our local economies.

**Promote community benefit agreements:** This innovative [local strategy](#) ensures that economic development actually benefits workers, residents, the environment and the community where it occurs.

## Worker rights

**Prevent wage theft, enforce labor law:** Good employers are essential to their communities and Ohio is lucky to have many. But millions of Americans have their wages stolen by employers who don't pay for all hours worked. An attorney general report estimated that wage theft and misclassification costs Ohio more than \$790 million annually in lost unemployment insurance tax, worker compensation premiums, and tax revenue. Ohio [does less](#) than other states to deal with this and other labor law violations. Safe workplaces, correctly classified workers, accurate payment of insurance and benefits, and adherence to all labor law is what most employers strive for. When these laws are ignored, workers and law-abiding employers suffer. Increasing our labor law enforcement staff would help.

**Preserve and encourage collective bargaining:** Collective bargaining gives workers a way to stick together and a shared voice. Without it, employees can go unheard and wage and safety standards for all workers can decline. Ohio was smart to preserve public sector collective bargaining, which can [improve communities](#), productivity, and worker lives. Now private sector collective bargaining is under attack in the form of attacks on fair share. Unions have to represent everyone in a workplace, even non-members. Under current law, democratically elected unions are permitted to negotiate contracts that require a fair share payment, so that those who benefit from the union pay a fee toward the costs of negotiating and administering workplace contracts. Some want to get rid of this, making Ohio a so-called “right to work” (SCRTW) state. SCRTW laws do not create the right to a job. In fact, [SCRTW states](#) have lower wages, worse benefits, more workplace injuries and more poverty. Instead of getting rid of union protection, we should encourage unionization of home health care workers and childcare workers, two important and underpaid occupations. Fast food and retail workers would also win with better representation.

## Balancing work and family

**Let employees earn paid sick days:** Many employers provide paid sick days, because they recognize that it is better for customers, clients, workers and productivity. But at last count 2.2 million Ohio workers could not take a paid day off when sick, and 3.3 million could not care for a sick child. Letting employees earn up to seven paid sick days a year will improve family well being, save money as fewer others get sick, and reduce illness in those serving our food, caring for our children, and standing across the checkout counter from us. [Learn more](#).

**Provide parental leave:** [Paid parental leave](#) is good for mothers, fathers, children, families and workplaces. Ohio should allow employees to earn paid parental leave.

## Upskilling

**Invest in training:** More investments in education and training will position our workers well. Stay tuned for more in later policy briefs on this.

*To ensure a short, accessible list, we necessarily left off some great ideas. Contact us to learn more about helping the unemployed, ending discrimination, improving retirement, promoting higher wages, raising standards for public spending, limiting contracting out or encouraging employee ownership. Good jobs are essential to the Ohio economy. These ideas would create jobs, raise wages, reduce poverty, and improve our communities.*