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September bump

Modest job gains help Ohio edge above our June peak

After a couple months of disappointing news, September's job report provides some modestly positive news. Ohio added 6,000 jobs last month, according to data from the monthly survey of employers released today by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS). As of last month, Ohio's total job count stood at about 5.3 million, finally eking above our post-recession jobs peak set back in June.

Monthly numbers are always preliminary and subject to revision, making it unwise to make too much of monthly fluctuations. Even with September growth and an upward revision of the job number originally reported for August, the state's 12-month job growth rate was just 0.6 percent. The state continued to trail the nation, which reported 1.9 percent growth over the same period. While the country has recovered the jobs lost during the recession, Ohio needs more than 114,000 jobs to get back to our pre-recession job count.

"Ohio continues its ride on the job growth seesaw," said Hannah Halbert, workforce researcher with Policy Matters Ohio. "Ohio is producing modest monthly job gains followed by modest monthly losses or months of tepid growth, but we're not seeing momentum and we are nowhere near robust job growth."

A separate ODJFS survey of households also showed gains. The unemployment rate declined slightly to 5.6 percent and the underlying labor market indicators all moved in the right direction. Employment as counted in this separate survey grew (16,000) and unemployment decreased (5,000), as the labor force expanded by 11,000. Labor force growth is good, as it's a sign of an expanding economy. However, Ohio's labor force remains down by 38,000 from this time last year and by 225,000 since the start of the recession.

"Ohio's recovery is slow, shallow, and fragile," said Halbert. "The state should prioritize policies that help people work and increase income. Reducing barriers to higher education, expanding job-connected training programs and raising the minimum wage would help the state regain some lost momentum."

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