Still working for too little in Columbus
Michael Shields and Bryce Springfield

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).
### Still working for too little

Pay growth recovered lost ground in most common Columbus MSA jobs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top 10 occupations 2022</th>
<th>Job growth</th>
<th>Pay growth</th>
<th>Pay level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2022 rank</td>
<td>2022 jobs</td>
<td>2022 median hourly pay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stockers and Order Fillers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>36,500</td>
<td>17,220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast Food and Counter Workers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>26,880</td>
<td>-6,430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Service Reps General and Operations Managers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>26,300</td>
<td>-4,990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registered Nurses</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>24,670</td>
<td>11,720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand Retail Salespersons</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>24,430</td>
<td>-2,260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Health and Personal Care Aides</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23,950</td>
<td>-4,110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cashiers</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22,670</td>
<td>-4,860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22,020</td>
<td>-1,790</td>
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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.