Too many jobs in Cincinnati pay too little and many pay less as a share of poverty than they did nearly two decades ago. New data released by the U.S. Department of Labor show that six of the Cincinnati area’s 10 most common jobs pay the typical worker too little to feed a family of three without food assistance (earnings under 130 percent of poverty, about $27,000 typically qualify). Of the 10 most common jobs, all but one pay a typical worker less than $35,000, for full-time year round work, and half pay less than $25,000.

This data confirms that job quality matters to family stability. During this budget cycle, policymakers should not restrict access to food and health insurance when so many jobs offer neither. The challenge is not requiring people to work, as most already do. Rather, the true challenge is getting employers—many of which are major international corporations with vast profits—to pay a fair wage with benefits and set a schedule that provides stability.

Many of Ohio’s most common jobs now simply pay too little to eliminate need. That is also true in Cincinnati. Low wages were not always so ubiquitous in Cincinnati. In 2000, five of the 10 most common occupations paid so little that a family of three was left dependent on food assistance to get by—now it is six. Some occupations, like food service workers and retail salespersons are paid less as a share of poverty in 2018 than they were a decade and a half ago. The new rules of Ohio’s labor market are so tilted in favor of corporate employers that many Cincinnatians will not be able to work their way to self-sufficiency.
Cincinnati on average had 1,108,400 jobs last year. That’s 64,600 more jobs than in 2007, when the last recession began. The Cincinnati region has been a driver of the Ohio recovery. One of the top jobs, registered nurse, provides better earnings. This job relies in part on maintaining expanded health insurance coverage. Yet, many of the jobs that have grown over recent years do not offer the same income or stability as those lost. Growing sectors, in leisure and hospitality services, often pay poorly and lack benefits.

Job quality has been eroded. Ohio tax policy has sent big cuts to the wealthiest, shrinking funding for education, infrastructure, and healthcare—investments that help working people and their kids get ahead. Policy Matters Ohio has set out 10 policy priorities that help working people by raising wages, extending overtime protections, providing paid leave, preserving public jobs and more. These new data show that such policies are essential in Cincinnati where jobs still make it hard to get by.