

Working for less: Most common Columbus jobs pay too little, 2019

Too many jobs in Columbus 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 Columbus 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). Even though Columbus has had robust job growth since the recession, many working people have not been included in the expansion. Of the 10 most common jobs, all but two pay a typical worker less than \$35,000, for full-time year round work, and four pay less than \$25,000.

This data confirms that job quality matters to family stability. 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.

Working for Less				
Most common occupations in the Columbus metropolitan area, by employment, 2018				
Top 10 occupations 2018	Total Employment	Median Hourly Wage	Median Annual Salary	Median annual earnings as a share of poverty
Food Prep & Serving Workers, Incl. Fast Food	30,760	\$9.38	\$19,510	94%
Laborers & Freight, Stock & Material Movers	29,700	\$13.90	\$28,910	139%
Customer Service Reps	27,630	\$16.63	\$34,590	167%
Retail Sales	27,540	\$11.09	\$23,070	111%
Registered Nurses	23,880	\$30.31	\$63,050	303%
Waiters & Waitresses	21,770	\$9.43	\$19,610	94%
Cashiers	19,570	\$10.00	\$20,790	100%
Office Clerks	19,250	\$17.15	\$35,680	172%
Stock Clerks & Order Fillers	16,150	\$12.76	\$26,530	128%
Janitors & Cleaners, except Maids & Housekeeping	14,940	\$12.81	\$26,650	128%

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Occupational Employment Statistics (OES) Survey, May 2018 estimates, available at <https://www.bls.gov/oes/tables.htm>, accessed April 13, 2019. Largest detail occupations in Columbus MSA by employment. Median annual earnings shown as a share of the poverty threshold for a family of three in 2018 (\$20,780). The gross monthly income threshold for food assistance is generally 130 percent of poverty.

Many of Ohio's most common jobs now simply pay too little to eliminate need. That is also true in Columbus. Policymakers should not restrict access to food and health insurance when so many jobs offer neither. Low wages were not always so ubiquitous in Columbus. In 2000, four of the 10 most common occupations in the Columbus area paid so little that a family of three was left dependent on food assistance to get by – today it is six. Many occupations paid less as a share of poverty in 2018 than they did a decade and a half ago. The new rules of Ohio's labor market are so tilted in favor of corporate employers that many in Columbus will not be able to work their way to self-sufficiency.

Wrong Direction

Columbus occupations, employment and median annual wage: 2000, 2017, and 2018

Top 10 occupations 2000	Earnings as share of poverty	Top 10 occupations 2017	Earnings as share of poverty	Top 10 occupations 2018	Earnings as share of poverty
Retail Sales	119%	Food Prep & Serving Workers, incl. Fast Food	94%	Food Prep & Serving Workers, Incl. Fast Food	94%
Customer Service Reps	171%	Laborers & Freight, Stock & Material Movers	131%	Laborers & Freight, Stock & Material Movers	139%
Cashiers	109%	Retail Sales	109%	Customer Service Reps	167%
Laborers & Freight, Stock & Material Movers	147%	Customer Service Reps	159%	Retail Sales	111%
Waiters & Waitresses	92%	Registered Nurses	306%	Registered Nurses	303%
Office Clerks	159%	Cashiers	96%	Waiters & Waitresses	94%
Stock Clerks & Order Fillers	133%	Waiters & Waitresses	95%	Cashiers	100%
General Operations Managers	422%	Office Clerks	165%	Office Clerks	172%
Food Prep & Serving Workers, incl. Fast Food	102%	Stock Clerks & Order Fillers	122%	Stock Clerks & Order Fillers	128%
Registered Nurses	306%	Janitors & Cleaners, except Maids & Housekeeping	122%	Janitors & Cleaners, except Maids & Housekeeping	128%

Source: BLS, OES Survey, 2000, 2017 Columbus MSA estimates and May 2018 estimates, accessed 4/13/19 at <https://www.bls.gov/oes/tables.htm>. Largest detail occupations in Columbus MSA by employment. Median annual earnings shown as share of poverty threshold for a family of three in 2000 (\$14,150), 2017 (\$20,420), and 2018 (20,780). The gross monthly income threshold for food assistance is generally 130 percent of poverty.

Columbus on average had 1,099,500 jobs last year, 138,700 more than in 2007, when the last recession began. Columbus is a driver of the statewide recovery. Most of the top jobs do not offer the same income or stability as top jobs from 2000. Service sector occupations like stock clerks, janitors, retail workers, and servers have not seen wage improvements despite the tightening job market. Policy is needed to help close the gap.

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.