

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

Too many jobs in Ohio 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 Ohio’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 typically qualify). The total share of jobs paying below this basic earnings threshold improved slightly since 2018. Still, the most common jobs in the state pay very low wages. Of the 10 most common jobs, nine pay less than \$34,000 a year, and six pay less than about \$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.

Working for Less				
Most common Ohio occupations 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, including Fast Food	160,070	\$9.31	\$19,360	93%
Retail Salesperson	154,490	\$11.06	\$23,010	111%
Registered Nurses	125,380	\$30.87	\$64,200	309%
Cashiers	121,600	\$9.71	\$20,190	97%
Laborers & Freight, Stock & Material Movers	119,220	\$13.67	\$28,440	137%
Office Clerks	109,130	\$15.74	\$32,730	158%
Customer Service Reps	100,500	\$16.18	\$33,650	162%
Waiters & Waitresses	94,720	\$9.37	\$19,490	94%
Janitors & Cleaners, except Maids & Housekeeping	81,910	\$12.03	\$25,030	120%
Stock Clerks & Order Fillers	79,790	\$11.96	\$24,880	120%

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 21, 2019. Largest detail occupations in Ohio 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.

Low wages were not always so ubiquitous in Ohio. In 2000, only four 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. The new rules of Ohio’s labor market are so tilted in favor of corporate employers that many Ohioans will not be able to work their way to self-sufficiency. Six of the top occupations had slightly higher median earnings than they did in 2017, but only one of those, office clerks, had typical earnings greater than in 2000, as a share of the poverty rate.

Wrong Direction

Most common Ohio 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	114%	Food Prep & Serving Workers, incl. Fast Food	94%	Food Prep & Serving Workers, incl. Fast Food	93%
Cashiers	100%	Retail Sales	109%	Retail Sales	111%
Food Prep & Serving Workers, incl. Fast Food	93%	Registered Nurses	310%	Registered Nurses	309%
Laborers & Freight, Stock & Material Movers	142%	Cashiers	95%	Cashiers	97%
Registered Nurses	299%	Laborers & Freight, Stock & Material Movers	132%	Laborers & Freight, Stock & Material Movers	137%
General & Operations Managers	407%	Office Clerks	152%	Office Clerks	158%
Office Clerks	146%	Waiters & Waitresses	94%	Customer Service Reps	162%
Team Assemblers	167%	Customer Service Reps	158%	Waiters & Waitresses	94%
Janitors & Cleaners, except Maids & Housekeeping	124%	Janitors & Cleaners, except Maids & Housekeeping	117%	Janitors & Cleaners, except Maids & Housekeeping	120%
Customer Service Reps	175%	Stock Clerks & Order Fillers	118%	Stock Clerks & Order Fillers	120%

Source: BLS, OES Survey, 2000 state estimates and May 2018 estimates, accessed 4/20/19 at <https://www.bls.gov/oes/tables.htm>. Largest detail occupations in Ohio 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.

Ohio has regained the number of jobs lost during the last recession. But adjusting for growth in the potential labor force, our state is still 16,000 jobs short of the number needed. Among the top jobs, only registered nurse pays more than twice the poverty line. Other jobs that have grown offer less income and stability than those lost. Manufacturing took the biggest hit. General operations managers and assembly line workers are no longer top occupations, replaced by waiters, waitresses, stock clerks and order fillers. Growing sectors, like leisure and hospitality, often pay poorly and lack benefits. These trends of job growth in lower paid, less secure sectors have only continued since the 2007 recession.

Since 2017 four regions saw the share of top occupations paying less than 130% of poverty for a family of three fall: Akron, Canton, Lima, and Springfield. Only three regions, Canton, Columbus, and Cincinnati have recovered the number of jobs lost to the 2007 recession, and one, Dayton, is a little worse than the state average, having seven of the 10 most common occupations falling below the 130% threshold. Ohio must do better. 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 an economy where jobs still make it hard to get by.