Working for less: Most common Cincinnati jobs pay too little

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 typically qualify). At a time when state and federal policymakers are determined to erect new barriers to food assistance and health care, these new data show that 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 their workers a fair wage with benefits and set a schedule that provides some measure of job security.

Many of Ohio’s most common jobs now simply pay too little to eliminate need. That is also true in Cincinnati. Policymakers should not restrict access to food and health insurance when so many jobs offer neither. 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’s six. Some occupations paid less as a share of poverty in 2017 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 Cincinnatians will not be able to work their way to self-sufficiency.

* By Hannah Halbert, with research assistance from Isaac Miller
Cincinnati on average had 1,093,600 jobs last year. That’s 49,800 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 coverage. Yet, many of the jobs that have grown over recent years do not offer the same income or stability as those lost. Manufacturing took the biggest hit. Growing sectors, like leisure and hospitality, 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.