

Working for less: Many common Cleveland jobs pay too little*

Too many jobs in Cleveland 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 five of the Cleveland 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.

Working for Less				
Most common occupations in the Cleveland metropolitan area, by employment, 2017				
Top 10 occupations 2017	Total Employment	Median Hourly Wage	Median Annual Salary	Median annual earnings as a share of poverty
Retail Salespersons	28,260	\$10.67	\$22,190	109%
Registered Nurses+	27,540	\$34.42	\$67,420	330%
Food Prep & Serving Workers, including Fast Food	25,230	\$9.21	\$19,150	94%
Cashiers+	21,700	\$9.42	\$19,600	96%
Office Clerks+	20,170	\$15.09	\$31,390	154%
Waiters & Waitresses+	18,680	\$9.28	\$19,300	95%
Laborers & Freight, Stock & Material Movers	17,930	\$12.97	\$26,970	132%
Janitors & Cleaners, except Maids & Housekeeping-	16,380	\$11.07	\$23,030	113%
Customer Service Reps+	15,950	\$16.57	\$34,460	169%
Secretaries and Admin Assistants, except legal, medical and exec.+	15,920	\$17.17	\$35,720	175%

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Occupational Employment Statistics (OES) Survey, May 2017 estimates, available at <https://www.bls.gov/oes/tables.htm>, accessed April 13, 2018. Largest detail occupations in Cleveland-Elyria MSA by employment. Median annual earnings shown as a share of the poverty threshold for a family of three in 2017 (\$20,420). The gross monthly income threshold for food assistance is generally 130 percent of poverty. Red text highlights the occupations paying a typical wage below this threshold. (-) indicates a median wage lower than the state median for that occupation. (+) indicates a median wage higher than the state’s for that occupation.

Many of Ohio’s most common jobs pay too little to eliminate need. That is also true in Cleveland. Policymakers should not restrict access to food and health insurance when so many jobs offer neither. Low wages were not always so ubiquitous in Cleveland. In 2000, 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’s five. 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 in Cleveland will not be able to work their way to self-sufficiency.

* By Hannah Halbert, with research assistance from Isaac Miller

Wrong Direction			
Cleveland occupations, employment and median annual wage: 2000 and 2017			
Top 10 occupations 2000	Earnings as share of poverty	Top 10 occupations 2017	Earnings as share of poverty
Retail Salespersons	116%	Retail Salespersons-	109%
Cashiers	101%	Registered Nurses+	330%
Laborers & Freight, Stock & Material Movers	135%	Food Prep & Serving Workers, including Fast Food+	94%
Registered Nurses	325%	Cashiers-	96%
General & Operations Managers	470%	Office Clerks-	154%
Janitors & Cleaners, except Maids & Housekeeping+	121%	Waiters & Waitresses+	95%
Office Clerks, General	156%	Laborers & Freight, Stock & Material Movers-	132%
Food Prep & Serving Workers, including Fast Food	92%	Janitors & Cleaners, except Maids & Housekeeping-	113%
Team Assemblers	161%	Customer Service Reps-	169%
Customer Service Reps	182%	Secretaries and Admin Assistants, except legal, medical and exec.-	175%

Source: BLS, OES Survey, 2000 Cleveland, Lorain-Elyria MSA estimates and May 2017 estimates, accessed 4/13/18 at <https://www.bls.gov/oes/tables.htm>. Largest detail occupations in Cleveland MSA by employment. Median annual earnings shown as share of poverty threshold for a family of three in 2000 (\$14,150) and 2017 (\$20,420). The gross monthly income threshold for food assistance is generally 130 percent of poverty. Red font notes occupations that have median annual earnings under 130% of poverty for a family of three. (+) indicates earnings increased since 2000, (-) indicates the earnings decreased since 2000, as a share of poverty

Cleveland on average had 1,057,600 jobs last year. That’s 14,700 fewer jobs than in 2007, when the last recession began. Cleveland is still struggling to recover. One top job, registered nurse, provides better earnings. Its continued strength relies in part on maintaining health coverage. But most jobs that have grown over recent years offer less income and stability than those lost. Manufacturing took the biggest hit. Growing sectors, like leisure and hospitality, often pay poorly and lack benefits.

Tax policy has sent big cuts to the wealthiest, shrinking funding to support 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 Cleveland where jobs still make it hard to get by.

