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 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 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 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 Columbus will not be able to work their way to self-sufficiency.

* By Hannah Halbert, with research assistance from Isaac Miller
Columbus on average had 1,083,900 jobs last year, 123,100 more than in 2007, when the last recession began. Columbus is a driver of the statewide recovery. While one of the top jobs, registered nurse, pays well above twice the poverty line, the others do not. Most of the top jobs do not offer the same income or stability as top jobs from 2000. Manufacturing, which offered good jobs for less educated workers, took the biggest hit.

Job quality has been eroded. 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 Columbus where jobs still make it hard to get by.