

Working for less in a Cincinnati: Most common jobs pay too little

The economy comes down to people: people who work, buy and sell. An economy that relies on working people who can't afford to get by is shaky even in the best of times. Now more than ever, Ohioans need leaders who put people first. Reporting to work in the midst of a pandemic is a frightening new reality for many working Ohioans. Others are out of work to comply with Gov. DeWine's stay-at-home order. Many still wait for unemployment compensation to arrive. Many have lost health insurance and some worry how they will cope if they or a family member falls ill.

As Ohioans scramble to take care of one another and meet basic needs, low wages compound the hardship. New data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics show a jobs landscape already drastically outmoded. More than 105,000 greater Cincinnati residents who were working this March are out of work today.¹ But looking at the jobs that dominated the region's labor market through May of 2019 sheds light on the challenges workers still at or recently laid off from work face today. These data show that even before the pandemic and after a decade of economic growth, many people in Cincinnati area communities lived on the brink.

Working for Less

Most common occupations in the Cincinnati metropolitan area by employment, 2019

Top 10 occupations 2019	Total Employment	Median Hourly Wage	Median Annual Salary	Median annual earnings as a share of poverty
Fast Food and Counter Workers*	34,180	\$9.56	\$19,890	93%
Retail Salespeople	29,160	\$11.29	\$23,480	110%
Laborers and Freight, Stock & Material Handlers*	28,060	\$14.46	\$30,070	141%
Customer Service Representatives	24,690	\$16.56	\$34,440	161%
Registered nurses*	24,480	\$32.40	\$67,380	316%
Cashiers*	20,960	\$10.59	\$22,030	103%
Office Clerks	20,310	\$17.12	\$35,610	167%
Stockers and order fillers*	19,110	\$12.77	\$26,560	125%
Waiters and Waitresses	18,950	\$9.43	\$19,620	92%
General and Operations Managers	14,430	\$47.95	\$99,730	468%

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Occupational Employment Statistics (OES) Survey, May 2019 estimates, available at <https://www.bls.gov/oes/tables.htm>, accessed April 8, 2020. Largest detail occupations in the Cincinnati MSA by employment. Median annual earnings shown as a share of the poverty threshold for a family of three in 2019 (\$21,330). The gross monthly income threshold for food assistance is 130% of poverty (\$27,729) or less. Red text highlights the occupations paying a typical wage below this threshold. Asterisk (*) indicates that a job would likely be considered "essential" under Gov. DeWine's stay-at-home directive.

¹ Initial unemployment compensation filings four weeks ended April 11, 2020, <https://bit.ly/2y6bfBZ> Brown, Butler, Clermont, Hamilton and Warren Counties.

Too many greater Cincinnati jobs pay too little. In 2019 five of the top 10 jobs left a worker with a family of three in need of food aid. That is the same share as in 2000 and one fewer than in 2018. In the Cincinnati MSA, more top jobs saw wage increases (4) than losses (3), since 2000. While better than that of most MSAs, Cincinnati's progress was too little to insulate workers against income disruptions. Wages so low would not even have been possible half a century ago. At its peak in 1968, the federal minimum wage was worth over \$12 per hour in today's dollars: more than the median wage in four of Cincinnati's 10 most common jobs.

No progress					
Most common Cincinnati MSA occupations, employment and median annual wage: 2000, 2018, and 2019					
Top 10 occupations 2000	Earnings as share of poverty	Top 10 occupations 2018	Earnings as share of poverty	Top 10 occupations 2019	Earnings as share of poverty
Retail Salespeople	119%	Food Prep and Serving Workers, incl. Fast Food	92%	Fast Food and Counter Workers	93%
Cashiers	102%	Retail Salespeople	111%	Retail Salespeople	110%
Laborers and Freight, Stock & Material Movers	141%	Laborers and Freight, Stock & Material Movers	137%	Laborers and Freight, Stock & Material Handlers	141%
Food Prep and Serving Workers, incl. Fast Food	97%	Registered Nurses	313%	Customer Service Representatives	161%
General and Operations Managers	402%	Customer Service Representatives	157%	Registered Nurses	316%
Office Clerks	152%	Cashiers	102%	Cashiers	103%
Customer Service Representatives	177%	Waiters and Waitresses	93%	Office Clerks	167%
Registered Nurses	295%	Office Clerks	163%	Stockers and Order Fillers	125%
Waiters and Waitresses	93%	Stockers and Order Fillers	124%	Waiters and Waitresses	92%
Packers and Packagers	120%	Janitors and Cleaners, except Maids and Housekeeping	118%	General and Operations Managers	468%

Source: BLS, OES Survey, 2000 state estimates and May 2019 estimates, accessed April 8, 2020 at <https://www.bls.gov/oes/tables.htm>. Largest detail occupations in Cincinnati MSA by employment. Median annual earnings shown as share of poverty threshold for a family of three in 2000 (\$14,150), 2018 (\$20,780), and 2019 (\$21,330). Red font indicates occupations that have median annual earnings under 130% of poverty, the typical threshold for food aid, for a family of three. Asterisk (*) indicates likely "essential" occupation.

These paltry wages left many with no savings to withstand a coronavirus layoff. Policy Matters Ohio has set out four policy priorities to help working people through the crisis and beyond. Ohio lawmakers can protect people today and build a stronger state for tomorrow by protecting essential workers, shoring up unemployment comp, providing paid sick leave, and making sure all working people, no matter what job they do, get a fair return for their work.