

Working for less in Columbus: 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 135,000 greater Columbus residents who were working this March are out of work today.¹ But looking at the jobs that dominated greater Columbus's labor market through May of 2019 sheds important 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 Columbus and surrounding communities lived on the brink.

Working for Less				
Most common occupations in the Columbus 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
Laborers and Freight, Stock & Material Movers	32,010	\$14.77	\$30,730	144%
Fast Food and Counter Workers	31,730	\$9.61	\$19,980	94%
Customer Service Representatives	30,030	\$16.89	\$35,130	165%
Retail Salespersons	27,920	\$11.51	\$23,930	112%
Registered Nurses	23,250	\$30.74	\$63,940	300%
Home Health and Personal Care Aides	22,540	\$11.32	\$23,540	110%
Office Clerks	20,280	\$17.61	\$36,620	172%
Waiters and Waitresses	19,990	\$9.77	\$20,330	95%
Stockers and Order Fillers	18,800	\$13.42	\$27,910	131%
Cashiers	17,980	\$10.64	\$22,140	104%

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 Columbus 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/2v6bfBZ>. Delaware, Fairfield, Franklin, Hocking, Licking, Madison, Morrow, Perry, Pickaway and Union Counties.

Too many greater Columbus jobs pay too little. By 2019 six of the top 10 jobs left a worker with a family of three in need of food aid, up from just four in 2000. 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 half of Columbus's 10 most common jobs.

Wrong Direction					
Most common Columbus 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	94%	Laborers and Freight, Stock, & Material Movers *	144%
Customer Service Reps	171%	Laborers and Freight, Stock & Material Movers	139%	Fast Food and Counter Workers*	94%
Cashiers	109%	Customer Service Representatives	167%	Customer Service Representatives	165%
Laborers and Freight, Stock & Material Movers	147%	Retail Salespeople	111%	Retail Salespeople	112%
Waiters and Waitresses	92%	Registered Nurses	303%	Registered Nurses*	300%
Office Clerks	159%	Waiters and Waitresses	94%	Home Health and Personal Care Aides*	110%
Stockers and Order Fillers	133%	Cashiers	100%	Office Clerks, General	172%
General and Operations Managers	422%	Office Clerks	172%	Waiters and Waitresses	95%
Food Prep and Serving Workers, incl. Fast Food	102%	Stockers and Order Fillers	128%	Stockers and Order Fillers*	131%
Registered Nurses	306%	Janitors and Cleaners, except Maids and Housekeeping	128%	Cashiers*	104%

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 Columbus 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.