

Working for less in Dayton: 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 59,000 Montgomery, Greene and Miami County residents who were working this March are out of work today.¹ But looking at the jobs that dominated greater Dayton 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 Dayton and surrounding communities lived on the brink.

Working for Less

Most common occupations in the Dayton 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
Registered Nurse*	12,100	\$32.64	\$67,900	318%
Retail Salespeople	11,130	\$11.01	\$22,910	107%
Fast Food and Counter Workers*	10,750	\$9.74	\$20,260	95%
Cashiers*	8,880	\$9.78	\$20,350	95%
Office Clerks	8,640	\$16.75	\$34,840	163%
Laborers and Freight, Stock & Material Movers *	7,690	\$13.66	\$28,410	133%
Customer Service Representatives	6,440	\$16.50	\$34,320	161%
Home Health and Personal Care Aides*	6,020	\$11.17	\$23,230	109%
Waiters and Waitresses	5,980	\$9.81	\$20,410	96%
Stockers and Order Fillers*	5,950	\$11.61	\$24,140	113%

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 Dayton 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 percent 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>

Too many greater Dayton jobs pay too little. Wages in five of the MSA’s largest occupations rose slightly since last year, and fell in three. Long-term is a bleaker story.² By 2019 six of the top 10 jobs paid so little that a family of three would need food aid, up from five 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 six of Dayton’s 10 most common jobs.

Wrong Direction					
Most common Dayton MSA occupations, employment and median annual wage: 2000, 2018, and 2019					
Top 10 occupations 2000	Earnings as share of poverty	Top 10 occupations 2019	Earnings as share of poverty	Top 10 occupations 2019	Earnings as share of poverty
Retail Salespeople	114%	Retail Salespeople	104%	Registered Nurses	318%
Cashiers	99%	Registered Nurses	323%	Retail Salespeople	107%
Team Assemblers	181%	Food Prep and Serving Workers, incl. Fast Food	95%	Fast Food and Counter Workers	95%
Registered Nurses	296%	Cashiers	94%	Cashiers	95%
Waiters and Waitresses	94%	Laborers and Freight, Stock & Material Movers	127%	Office Clerks	163%
General and Operations Managers	403%	Office Clerks	161%	Laborers and Freight, Stock & Material Movers	133%
Food Prep and Serving Workers, incl. Fast Food	100%	Waiters and Waitresses	95%	Customer Service Representatives	161%
Laborers and Freight, Stock & Material Movers	150%	Janitors and Cleaners, except Maids and Housekeeping	123%	Home Health and Personal Care Aides	109%
Secretaries, except Legal and Medical	153%	Stockers and Order Fillers	117%	Waiters and Waitresses	96%
Janitors and Cleaners, except Maids and Housekeeping	124%	Customer Service Representatives	167%	Stockers and Order Fillers	113%

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 Dayton 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.

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.

² Wages are shown as a share of poverty. Using this benchmark also accounts for inflation, since the Federal Poverty Threshold is indexed to inflation.