

Working for less in Akron: 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 50,000 Summit and Portage County 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 Akron and surrounding communities lived on the brink.

Working for Less

Most common occupations in the Akron 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*	12,500	\$9.49	\$19,730	92%
Retail Salespeople	9,010	\$11.71	\$24,350	114%
Registered Nurses*	8,490	\$32.70	\$68,020	319%
Customer Service Reps	7,170	\$16.78	\$34,890	164%
Office Clerks	6,780	\$17.05	\$35,470	166%
Stockers and Order Fillers*	6,060	\$11.84	\$24,620	115%
Cashiers*	5,710	\$10.60	\$22,040	103%
Janitors and Cleaners, except Maids and Housekeeping*	5,530	\$11.95	\$24,850	117%
Home Health and Personal Care Aides*	5,470	\$10.98	\$22,830	107%
Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers*	4,840	\$21.65	\$45,040	211%

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 Akron 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>

Too many greater Akron 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 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 six of Akron's 10 most common jobs.

Wrong Direction					
Most common Akron 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	113%	Food Prep and Serving Workers, incl. Fast Food	94%	Fast Food and Counter Workers*	92%
Cashiers	100%	Retail Salespeople	114%	Retail Salespeople	114%
Team Assemblers	151%	Registered Nurses	335%	Registered Nurses*	319%
Stockers and Order Fillers	118%	Customer Service Reps	163%	Customer Service Reps	164%
General and Operations Managers	415%	Cashiers	99%	Office Clerks	166%
Office Clerks	142%	Office Clerks	159%	Stockers and Order Fillers*	115%
Truck Drivers	235%	Laborers and Freight, Stock & Material Movers	142%	Cashiers*	103%
Registered Nurses	327%	Stock Clerks and Order Fillers	115%	Janitors and Cleaners, except Maids and Housekeeping*	117%
Secretaries, Except Legal & Medical	163%	Janitors and Cleaners, except Maids and Housekeeping	115%	Home Health and Personal Care Aides*	107%
Food Prep and Serving Workers, incl. Fast Food	99%	Waiters and Waitresses	94%	Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers*	211%

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 Akron 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.