

Working for less in Cleveland: 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. Nearly 150,000 Cleveland MSA residents who were working this March are out of work today.¹ But looking at the jobs that dominated greater Cleveland 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 Cleveland area communities lived on the brink.

Working for Less

Most common occupations in the Cleveland 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*	29,910	\$9.71	\$20,200	95%
Retail Salespersons	29,830	\$11.27	\$23,430	110%
Registered Nurses*	25,600	\$33.89	\$70,490	330%
Customer Service Representatives	23,580	\$17.58	\$36,570	171%
Office Clerks	23,490	\$16.88	\$35,120	165%
Laborers and Freight, Stock & Material Movers*	21,680	\$14.51	\$30,190	142%
Cashiers*	21,230	\$10.63	\$22,120	104%
Home Health and Personal Care Aides*	18,970	\$10.93	\$22,730	107%
Janitors and Cleaners, except Maids and Housekeeping*	15,880	\$12.80	\$26,630	125%
Waiters and Waitresses	15,810	\$9.45	\$19,660	95%

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 Cleveland 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> Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, Lorain and Medina Counties.



Too many greater Cleveland jobs pay too little. In 2019 six of the top 10 jobs paid so little that a family of three would need 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 half of Cleveland's 10 most common jobs.

Wrong Direction					
Most common Cleveland 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	116%	Retail Salespeople	112%	Fast Food and Counter Workers*	95%
Cashiers	101%	Registered Nurses	330%	Retail Salespeople	110%
Laborers and Freight, Stock & Material Movers	135%	Food Prep and Serving Workers, incl. Fast Food	94%	Registered Nurses*	330%
Registered Nurses	325%	Cashiers	98%	Customer Service Representatives	171%
General and Operations Managers	470%	Office Clerks	161%	Office Clerks	165%
Janitors and Cleaners, except Maids and Housekeeping	121%	Customer Service Representatives	168%	Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers *	142%
Office Clerks	156%	Laborers and Freight, Stock & Material Movers	136%	Cashiers*	104%
Food Prep and Serving Workers, incl. Fast Food	92%	Waiters and Waitresses	95%	Home Health and Personal Care Aides*	107%
Team Assemblers	161%	Janitors & Cleaners, except Maids and Housekeeping	119%	Janitors and Cleaners, except Maids and Housekeeping*	125%
Customer Service Representatives	182%	Stockers and Order Fillers	120%	Waiters and Waitresses	95%

Source: BLS, OES Survey, 2000 state estimates and May 2018 estimates, accessed 4/20/19 at <https://www.bls.gov/oes/tables.htm>. Largest detail occupations in Ohio by employment. Median annual earnings shown as share of poverty threshold for a family of three in 2000 (\$14,150) and 2017 (\$20,420). The gross monthly income threshold for food assistance is generally 130% of poverty. Red font notes occupations that have median annual earnings under 130% of poverty for a family of three.

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.