

Working for less in Youngstown: 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 34,000 Mahoning and Trumbull County residents who worked in March are now out of work.¹ But looking at the jobs that dominated the Steel Valley through May of 2019 sheds light on the challenges workers 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 Youngstown 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	9,000	\$9.25	\$19,230	90%
Retail Salespersons	8,260	\$10.75	\$22,360	105%
Cashiers	6,320	\$10.18	\$21,180	99%
Home Health and Personal Care Aides	5,530	\$10.95	\$22,770	107%
Office Clerks	5,360	\$14.91	\$31,010	145%
Registered Nurses	4,290	\$28.13	\$58,500	274%
Waiters and Waitresses	3,980	\$9.65	\$20,070	94%
Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	3,790	\$21.01	\$43,690	205%
Laborers and Freight, Stock & Material Movers	3,660	\$13.20	\$27,460	129%
Janitors and Cleaners, except Maids and Housekeeping	3,480	\$11.79	\$24,530	115%

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 Youngstown 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 Youngstown jobs pay too little. Wages fell in four of the MSA’s largest occupations since last year, and rose in two.² Wages in seven of the top 10 jobs paid so little that a family of three would need food aid, the same share as in 2000. 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 Youngstown’s 10 most common jobs in 2019.

Wrong Direction					
Most common Youngstown 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	104%	Retail Salespeople	106%	Fast Food and Counter Workers*	90%
Cashiers	93%	Food Prep and Serving Workers, incl. Fast Food	91%	Retail Salespeople	105%
Food Prep and Serving Workers, incl. Fast Food	89%	Cashiers	97%	Cashiers*	99%
Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	209%	Office Clerks	145%	Home Health and Personal Care Aides*	107%
Registered Nurses	285%	Registered Nurses	279%	Office Clerks	145%
General and Operations Managers	371%	Laborers and Freight, Stock & Material Movers	139%	Registered Nurses*	274%
Janitors and Cleaners, except Maids and Housekeeping	116%	Waiters and Waitresses	95%	Waiters and Waitresses	94%
Laborers and Freight, Stock & Material Movers	118%	Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	205%	Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers*	205%
Nursing Aides, Orderlies and Attendants	122%	Janitors and Cleaners, except Maids and Housekeeping	125%	Laborers and Freight, Stock & Material Movers*	129%
Waiters and Waitresses	93%	Secretaries and Admin Assistants, except Legal, Medical, Exec.	150%	Janitors and Cleaners, Except Maids and Housekeeping*	115%

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 Youngstown 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.