

Working for less in Ohio

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 of Ohio's working people. Others are out of work to comply with Gov. DeWine's stay-at-home order. Many still wait for unemployment compensation to arrive. Some worry how they will cope if they or a family member falls ill. Many have lost health insurance when they were sent home from work.

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 1 million Ohioans who were working this March are out of work today. But looking at the jobs that dominated Ohio'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 working Ohioans lived on the brink.

Working for Less				
Most common Ohio occupations 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 *	175,500	\$9.53	\$19,810	93%
Retail Salespeople	148,470	\$11.36	\$23,640	111%
Registered Nurses*	125,470	\$31.63	\$65,790	308%
Laborers and Freight, Stock & Material Movers*	118,130	\$14.43	\$30,010	141%
Cashiers*	117,440	\$10.29	\$21,400	100%
Office Clerks	116,010	\$16.49	\$34,310	161%
Customer Service Representatives	110,020	\$16.70	\$34,370	163%
Home Health and Personal Care Aides*	94,870	\$11.08	\$23,040	108%
Waiters and Waitresses	87,960	\$9.59	\$19,940	93%
Stockers and Order Fillers*	86,150	\$12.57	\$26,150	123%

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 Ohio 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.

Too many Ohio jobs pay too little. Wages in half the state’s largest occupations rose slightly since last year, but long-term is a different story.¹ Compared to 2000, only two occupations, registered nurse and office clerk, paid better in 2019. Three jobs paid worse, two paid the same, and three jobs that made the list in 2000 were gone by 2019, each of them replaced by a lower paying job. Half a century ago, wages so low would not have been possible. 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 Ohio’s 10 most common jobs.

Wrong Direction					
Most common Ohio 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	114%	Food Prep and Serving Workers, incl. Fast Food	93%	Fast Food and Counter Workers*	93%
Cashiers	100%	Retail Salespeople	111%	Retail Salespeople	111%
Food Prep and Serving Workers, incl. Fast Food	93%	Registered Nurses	309%	Registered Nurses*	308%
Laborers and Freight, Stock & Material Movers	142%	Cashiers	97%	Laborers and Freight, Stock & Material Movers*	141%
Registered Nurses	299%	Laborers and Freight, Stock & Material Movers	137%	Cashiers*	100%
General and Operations Managers	407%	Office Clerks	158%	Office Clerks	161%
Office Clerks	146%	Customer Service Representatives	162%	Customer Service Representatives	163%
Team Assemblers	167%	Waiters and Waitresses	94%	Home Health and Personal Care Aides*	108%
Janitors and Cleaners, except Maids and Housekeeping	124%	Janitors and Cleaners, except Maids and Housekeeping	120%	Waiters and Waitresses	93%
Customer Service Representatives	175%	Stockers and Order Fillers	120%	Stockers and Order Fillers*	123%

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 Ohio 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.

¹ Wages are shown as a share of poverty. Using this benchmark also accounts for inflation, since the Federal Poverty Threshold is indexed to inflation.