Work and Wages / COVID-19

Keeping Ohioans safe from COVID-19 at work
Protect workers and the public with statewide workplace safety guidelines
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During the COVID-19 pandemic, protecting working people on the job helps keep everyone safe and healthy. Workplaces have become transmission hubs. Workers doing some of the most critical work to support and care for others during the crisis are at the highest risk: Nationally, more than 900 health care workers have died of COVID-19. Without workplace safety mandates from the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), Ohio's leaders must act to protect working people and their communities during the pandemic, with safety mandates, enforcement, and supports to help workers and employers meet guidelines. Ohio's Responsible Restart plan creates workplace mandates and makes recommendations for voluntary steps to reduce transmission of COVID-19. With too little enforcement capacity, Ohio's plan over-relies on employers to voluntarily comply. Without paid sick leave, more Ohioans will report to work while sick instead of going without pay.

To better protect working people during the pandemic, state policymakers should:
Create and retain sensible workplace safety mandates:
- Implement enforceable workplace safety rules including employer-provided face masks, social distancing, hand sanitizing, regular cleaning and deep cleaning in cases of suspected exposure.
- Require businesses limit contact between workers and the public by enabling offsite work, staggering shifts, physical space and/or barriers, or reducing operations.
- Implement added safety guidelines for health care workers and first responders, modeled on the California OSHA Aerosol Transmissible Diseases standard.

Enforce mandates and empower workers:
- Enforce existing public health and workplace safety laws.
- Certify workers and unions as workplace safety monitors and implement anti-retaliation protocols to protect workers who report violations.
- Provide a private right of action for workers whose employers violate mandates, along with causes of action specifically for whistleblowers.
- Refuse to grant broadened immunity to employers who allow their workplaces to become transmission sites for COVID-19.

Provide financial means for high-risk and sick workers to stay home:
- Implement emergency paid sick leave and a permanent earned sick time system.
- Protect working people at high risk for severe complications by maintaining that they have just cause to quit work that exposes them to COVID-19.

Local governments can also keep working people safe. They can:
- Use their enforcement power and prioritize investigations of high-risk industries.
- File public nuisance lawsuits against employers that endanger public health.
- Revoke licenses or government contracts from persistent violators.
- Disclose information about public health order violators to customers.