



Work & Wages

A NEW WAY FORWARD: 10 WAYS TO SUPPORT OHIO'S WORKING PEOPLE

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Ohio's working people are the state's backbone. They make the products we use every day: cars, washing machines and more. They keep our communities safe. They teach our children and care for our ailing loved ones. They are all of us.

Working people deserve peace of mind, free of worry about how to put food on the table, pay for their kids' college or make the rent each month. State and federal policies have slowly chipped away at that sense of security. As a result, job growth has been weak and a vast gulf has opened between the wealth workers create at their jobs and the amount they take home in wages. The share of Ohio's working people who rejoined the workforce after the Great Recession trails the nation. Longstanding structural barriers keep African-Americans and women from earning as much as their white male peers, even as men's wages fall. Deep-rooted racism locks many people of color out of job opportunities. Punitive criminal justice policies dog Ohioans' efforts to get a good job for decades after convictions for even minor offenses, such as marijuana possession -- dragging biased past drug war policies into the present. The state's wealthiest 1 percent earned more than 19 times the average of the bottom 99 percent of earners combined.¹

Joining a union gives people a direct say in their working conditions and unions can impact public policy, making the economy fairer for everyone. When more people belonged to a union, more people shared in economic growth. Ohio's unionized workers make \$4.75 an hour more than their non-union counterparts, \$9,900 more a year for full-time work.² Union workers are more likely to have pensions and paid sick days, and less likely to be treated unfairly at work or experience harassment or workplace injuries. Union workers pay more in taxes and use the social safety net less than other workers.³ Black workers and white women earn more when they are in a union. Unions help balance the power of employers and make the economy more fair.

State policy can rig the system against workers. The Ohio legislature has barred local governments from improving working conditions, banned local hire ordinances that help set aside work for local residents, and passed tax cuts that favor the wealthiest Ohioans at the expense of our roads, schools and health care. But there are solutions. We can create an economy that works for everyone by helping working people speak up together, raising wages, and investing in communities instead of corporations.

In this, our second policy platform for Ohio's working people, we outline 10 policies to move Ohio forward. Instead of more tired attacks on labor and the working poor, policymakers could enact rules that support a more just and equitable economy. Ohio has a productive

¹ Hanauer, Amy. and Grace Chu (September 2, 2018) The State of Working Ohio 2018, <https://tinyurl.com/y4r8srvk>

² ibid

³ Sojourner, Aaron and José Pacas, The Relationship between Union Membership and Net Fiscal Impact, IZA Institute of Labor Economics (Jan 2018), <http://ftp.iza.org/dp11310.pdf>.

economy, but too few are sharing in the wealth they are helping to create. This platform sets out a new course for Ohio policy that will move us closer to an economy that works for all.

State and federal policy makers can make sure all Ohio's working people – not just the top 1 percent – can enjoy a decent life free from economic insecurity. Although this is by no means a definitive list,⁴ this report offers a new path forward with practical policy solutions that can be implemented today.

Recommendations

1. **Protect working people's right to organize:** Oppose so called "right to work" laws both nationally and here in Ohio and support labor neutrality agreements.
2. **Strengthen the public sector:** Roll back the massive state tax cuts that benefitted the wealthy. Instead, invest in public programs that expand opportunity such as workforce training, education, affordable childcare and public transportation.
3. **Empower local governments to pass their own laws to protect working people in their communities.**
4. **Fix Ohio's broken unemployment compensation system:** Our system can cover more low-wage workers and be solvent, if employers pay their fair share.
5. **Protect workers on the job with strong workers' compensation benefits.**
6. **Restore the minimum wage:** Increasing the minimum wage to \$15 by 2023 would give 2 million Ohio workers a much deserved and overdue raise.
7. **Restore the 40-hour work week:** Improvements to scheduling and overtime rules can bring back stability to the work week. Restored overtime protections would cover 351,000 Ohio workers.
8. **Paid leave should be the norm, not the exception.** Twenty-five years after the federal Family Medical Leave Act only 13 percent of private sector workers have any paid family leave. There is no federal law requiring paid sick leave. Ohio should enact legislation to provide workers with the opportunity to earn leave.
9. **Enforce rules that protect workers from wage theft:** Shorting workers on wages is theft and should be enforced as such. Paycheck transparency and funding for wage theft investigation will help.
10. **Work requirements don't work:** Bad jobs keep people in need. Policies to improve job quality and training can help families prosper. Work requirements in public benefit programs like food assistance and Medicaid keep people poor and sick.

⁴ For a more expansive list of policy reforms, see "Everyone's Economy: 25 Federal Policies to Lift Up Working People," Demos. February 2018 <https://tinyurl.com/y9lbu6ph> and the National Employment Law Project's work, State agenda for America's workers, at <https://www.nelp.org/publication/state-agenda-americas-workers-18-ways-promote-good-jobs-states/>.