



COVID-19

PUTTING JOBSOHIO TO WORK FOR OHIOANS **WENDY PATTON**

The people who live in Ohio do the work and make the purchases that keep the state's economy moving. COVID-19 has infected over 20,000 Ohioans and killed more than 1,100 as of May 5, 2020.¹ In March, Gov. Mike DeWine closed parts of the economy to slow the spread of the virus. Since then, 1 million Ohioans have filed for unemployment insurance.² Ohio's elected leaders must harness all available resources to create a recovery that protects health and financial security, and leaves no Ohioan out.

With a million people out of work and many businesses closed, state and local tax revenues have evaporated. Yet the need for government services grows every day. People must be tested and all who are sick must be treated. As many people return to work, workplaces must be safe, with proper oversight to dispel fears. Many jobs will be slow to return or may disappear: Many people will need employment. At the same time water plants must stay open, children must be educated, college students must continue their studies, garbage must be collected, public safety must be maintained and emergency services must keep running. All governments, partners and entities that act in the public interest must coordinate and invest strategically to ensure public services are sustained and to build for a safe and secure recovery. In this paper we scrutinize one partner of the government: Ohio's privatized economic development agency, JobsOhio. We propose new and direct ways the agency can target resources to help Ohio and Ohioans.

The highly profitable JobsOhio is part of a \$2.2 billion entity that administers and is funded by the state's liquor profits operations. JobsOhio is known as the entity responsible for job creation in the state. Gov. DeWine appoints the JobsOhio Board; he should ask them to harness those resources to make Ohio the safest state for all people to live and work and the best place to do business. There are several key ways JobsOhio can directly and immediately support hard-working Ohioans and keep families and communities afloat during these hard times:

¹ Ohio Department of Health COVID 19 dashboard at <https://bit.ly/353aVll>

² "The number of initial jobless claims filed in Ohio over the last five weeks stands at nearly 1 million (964,566)," Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, e-mailed release on unemployment claims, April 22, 2020.

- Use its resources to create jobs directly for people whose jobs are slow to come back or have disappeared. It can fund job corps, putting people to work weatherizing homes and addressing the lead poisoning crisis.
- It can also put unemployed workers in a job by boosting the public health work force through a job corps that expands the extent and duration of public health testing, contact tracing and other needed public health services.
- It can immediately work to expand Ohio's broadband capacity in underserved areas, like the Civilian Works Administration of the Depression, employing people and ensuring a service essential to education, health and business everywhere in the state.
- It can focus resources and investment to support minority owned businesses in the communities where people have been hit hardest by the pandemic and recession.