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Jobless claims still climbing, but fewer last week

The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) today reported that Ohioans filed 109,369 initial jobless claims for the week ended April 18, down from 226,007 the prior week. Total new claims for the last five weeks approached 1 million, with 964,566 filings. Together these claims exceed all jobless claims filed for the prior two years by 249,054. ODJFS has distributed initial payments to 376,000 claimants thus far. Policy Matters Ohio Researcher Michael Shields released the following statement:

“Flattening the curve of COVID-19 means Ohioans need to stay home from work until our health departments get the tests they need to prevent a surge of infections once businesses reopen. That means ODJFS must work quickly to get unemployment compensation (UC) to those who need it. [Ohio is falling behind other states](#) in allowing many workers who haven’t previously qualified for benefits to receive them.

“ODJFS said it will begin processing [newly eligible claimants](#) by mid-May. For folks who have been out of work since March, that’s a long time to wait. It’s understandable that getting a new claims system up and running takes time. It is not reasonable that many now waiting for federal help were excluded from state benefits they should have been eligible for in the first place.

“[Ohio law excludes](#) workers paid less than \$269 per week on average – like many of the restaurant workers sent home by Gov. DeWine on March 15 – from state UC benefits. Ohio law completely excludes drivers employed by ride-hailing companies such as Uber. ODJFS needs to get benefits to these workers as quickly as possible, and Ohio policymakers must change eligibility rules so they will be eligible for UC going forward.

“Alleviating hardship for workers displaced by this crisis is critical, and getting it right is the way to prevent a short-term disruption from becoming a protracted recession. Forcing Ohioans back to work before our health departments have the testing they need to isolate coronavirus cases would endanger lives. Instead Ohio’s leaders in government need to make sure people can cover the rent and groceries while their earnings are on hold. Maintaining their consumer spending is going to be vital to keeping businesses afloat and preventing long-term job loss.

“Too many Ohioans never recovered from the last recession. In the recovery from this crisis, Ohio can rebuild our economy in a way that strengthens everyone. This time we’ve got to get it right.”