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February gains inch closer to full jobs recovery Missing public sector jobs slowing progress

The takeaway: Ohio added jobs last month on top of substantial gains reported for 2022 when data were benchmarked earlier this month. Public sector job shortfalls now comprise two thirds of the jobs still missing from the state since COVID-19. Unemployment dipped to 3.9% as 14,000 Ohioans returned to the workforce and 19,000 job seekers found work. February inflation slowed to 6.0%.

The numbers: Seasonally adjusted data released today by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) show that Ohio employers restored 900 jobs over the month on top of an upwardly revised January report, landing Ohio at 5,575,500 total jobs for February. The gains come on top of news that Ohio closed out 2022 with 46,100 more jobs than previously reported for that year.

Ohio is now well on track to restore the 881,600 jobs lost to COVID-19, with 95.7% of those jobs recovered and 38,300 jobs still missing compared with February 2020.

“The restoration of these jobs is a great success story that underscores the power of government to drive an inclusive recovery by responding to needs at the scale of the problem,” said Policy Matters Ohio senior researcher, Michael Shields. “But COVID-19 also exposed serious shortfalls in job quality and pay that left too many Ohioans struggling to make it despite working. A return to the old status quo is not enough. It’s time to turn our focus to making every job in Ohio a good job, with pay that meets the cost of living and honors the value of work.”

The details: Government officials’ failure to restore public sector jobs now accounts for two thirds of the jobs still missing from Ohio (-25,600 jobs), with state jobs at a 7,600-job deficit compared with February 2020 (-4.2%), and local government jobs 19,400 jobs short (-3.6%).

“The public sector jobs shortfall is the glaring outlier in a solid jobs report on top of a strong year,” said Shields. “Leaving these jobs unfilled slows recovery and delivery of services Ohioans rely on, from teachers to street sweepers. [Lagging public sector pay](#) is a core problem. Government officials must use budget processes to [commit the resources](#) to raise public sector workers’ pay to a rate that aligns with the value of the vital work they do.”

The household survey: According to the separate household survey, 19,000 Ohioans found work last month, reducing the number of unemployed Ohioans by 5,000 and drawing 14,000 Ohioans into the workforce. Ohio’s unemployment rate fell 0.1 points to 3.9%. The nation’s unemployment rate rose 0.2 points to 3.6%.