



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## MAY 2023

### Work & Wages

## A New Way Forward

10 ways to support working people and restore prosperity and democracy to Ohio

### Michael Shields

Everyone who works deserves the opportunity to thrive, with a job that pays a livable wage and offers the benefits people need to manage work and family. Many Ohio working people have been left out. *A New Way Forward* is the policy prescription to solve some of the biggest challenges facing the state.

#### **Ohio can be a great state for working people. To get us there, leaders must:**

- Protect workers' right to join or form a union.
- Pass a minimum wage that meets the cost of living and respects the value of work.
- Protect working people from wage theft — and hold employers accountable.
- End misclassification and affirm ride-hail drivers as employees.
- Ensure paid sick leave for all Ohio workers.
- Fund quality child care for families and ensure livable wages for child care workers.
- End arbitrary and overbroad collateral sanctions that bar Ohioans with a record from work.
- Strengthen the public sector instead of cutting taxes for the wealthiest.
- Extend unemployment benefits to those blocked due to low pay, make benefits delivery more accessible and strengthen the system with additional funds from workers.
- Protect democracy.

Ohio workers at last have a strong job market, with jobs nearly recovered to their pre-COVID level.<sup>1</sup> This good news is a long time coming. After nearly a decade of slow recovery from the Great Recession the COVID-19 pandemic sent hundreds of thousands of workers home while putting others on the frontlines of the public health

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<sup>1</sup> Policy Matters Ohio will report on figures for Ohio in our upcoming State of Working Ohio report this Labor Day.

crisis. Over the longer term, employers have held down Ohioans' wages, while corporations and the wealthiest claimed a growing share of the new wealth workers made possible. There is a long way to go to rebuild an Ohio economy with broadly shared prosperity, and to ensure for the first time that all Ohioans are included, no matter their race, gender or other identities.

Some Ohio policymakers have cynically responded to the tighter labor market with policies that would weaken child labor protections, strip public sector workers of the right to strike, and make it more difficult for Ohioans who lose their jobs to access unemployment compensation.

But the solution to Ohio's labor market is not to force more people into work that isn't working for them. It's to improve the quality of the jobs in our state. The 10-point plan described in *A New Way Forward* will do just that.

Working people should be paid a wage that meets the cost of living and recognizes the value of their work. Still more basic: they should be paid for all the hours they work. Parents should have access to safe child care options for their children. Ohioans whose lives have been touched by the criminal legal system should have a second chance; their families are more secure and our communities safer when they get it. Everyone who works needs an opportunity to take time off to recover from an illness or care for a loved one, with pay. Ohio needs our public sector workers, and the sector provides opportunities for more equitable jobs. All workers should be covered by wage and other basic labor protections in state and federal law that connect with their status as employees. Ohioans laid off through no fault of their own deserve the peace of mind of knowing they can still meet basic needs while they search for a new job.

All these rights are easier to secure when working people have strong unions, and we maintain a strong political democracy. Workplace rights and civil rights go hand in hand. Greater union density helps workers claim power through participatory processes in their workplaces; the skills and power those processes build translate into political power.<sup>2</sup> This is a major reason that politicians who are hostile to democracy also attack working people's right to form a union. And it's a good reason for every pro-worker plan to begin by protecting that right.

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<sup>2</sup> Economic Policy Institute, "Unions help reduce disparities and strengthen our democracy," April 23, 2021, <https://www.epi.org/publication/unions-help-reduce-disparities-and-strengthen-our-democracy/>