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Contact: Hannah Halbert, 614-221-4505
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Ohio job market nearly flat over past year Monthly reports volatile, with little overall growth

Ohio's economic recovery remains fragile, with the state reporting 20,400 jobs lost in March. The new data released today by the Ohio Department of Job & Family Services in its monthly job report shows that Ohio added a measly 1,900 jobs this quarter. That translates to a growth rate of just 0.04 percent.

"Ohio job growth has been volatile for the last nine months," said Hannah Halbert, workforce researcher for Policy Matters Ohio. "March's loss erases the promising gain of more than 16,000 jobs in February."

This volatility should serve as an important reminder: Monthly numbers are preliminary and will likely be revised, so it is unwise to make too much over the month-to-month changes. Longer-term trends provide a more accurate gauge of the state's economic health.

Since the end of the recession, Ohio has added 133,700 jobs, growing at a rate of 2.7 percent. But that growth leveled off in the second half of 2012, and the reported zigzag of the last two months means that Ohio has only added 2,700 jobs over the past year, growing at a very weak 0.1 percent. A private-sector gain of 16,900 jobs has been nearly erased by the 14,200 jobs lost in the public sector. Most of those public job losses happened at the local level.

"Today's numbers add to a concerning trend," said Halbert. "The public-sector job losses are not only dragging down the Ohio economy – they also represent lost services and investment in our communities."

The separate survey of households ODJFS released today shows that Ohio's unemployment rate remained steady in March at 7.1 percent, lower than the national rate of 7.6 percent. The labor force declined by 1,000, meaning the total number of Ohioans working or actively seeking work is down by 25,000 (-0.4 percent) since this time last year. Over the same time period, the U.S. labor force has grown by 324,000 (+0.2 percent), though it declined in March.

"The last nine months demonstrate the weakness of our recovery," Halbert said. "Budget austerity is not producing results. We need to reinvest in our communities."

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*Policy Matters Ohio is a nonprofit, nonpartisan state policy research institute
with offices in Cleveland and Columbus.*