



GROWING PROSPERITY THROUGH SKILLED WORKERS, QUALITY JOBS, AND EQUITABLE SYSTEMS

# When Working Isn't Enough: What Low-Wage Workers Need Post-COVID

June 22, 2023

[ohioworkforcecoalition.org](https://ohioworkforcecoalition.org)



[@ohiowfc](https://twitter.com/ohiowfc)

# Agenda

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1. Welcome!
  - Introduce yourself in the chat with a question you would like answered today
2. Overview of the Ohio Workforce Coalition
3. *When Working Isn't Enough*
4. Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta and Worker Voice
5. Questions and Discussion

## The Coalition Vision

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A Future when:

- Ohioans have equitable access to opportunity, and the supports they need to take advantage of it;
- Ohio businesses have a skilled workforce advancing in quality jobs; and
- Ohio's workforce systems are aligned, transparent, inclusive, and accountable.

# The Coalition's mission is to:

**Build** and **engage** a multi-system network of workforce stakeholders from across Ohio to **develop** policy priorities and **advocate** for these priorities with local, state, and federal officials.



**Building a Network**

[Learn More](#)



**Growing Engagement**

[Learn More](#)



**Developing Policy Ideas**

[Learn More](#)



**Advocating for Change**

[Learn More](#)

## Strategic approach to mission

- Regional stakeholder networking and briefings
- Bi-Annual Conference and Day at the Statehouse
- Professional development and peer-learning
  - Skilling America Online Training
  - Aspen Institute Workforce Leadership Academy
  - Job-Quality Assessment Tool & Learning Network
- Tools and research for members to use in meetings with public officials, funders, and other stakeholders

# Policy Priorities

- 1. Funding and Supports:** Increase impact of state investments in training by increasing availability of supports for individuals in education and training or working in front-line, low-wage jobs.
- 2. Quality Jobs and Workplaces:** Identify and grow state policies that attract good jobs measured as more than strong wages. Recognize and support Ohio employers that are investing in their workforce and workplaces.
- 3. Equitable Access and Accountability:** Improve the availability of data to highlight how state investments are distributed and improve (or don't improve) access to education/training, employment, career advancement, and family supporting wages for Ohioans historically excluded from opportunities to thrive.

# *When Working Isn't Enough*



# When Working Isn't Enough

10 jobs high in one of these areas:

- Current Employment
- Current Openings
- Growth Projections

With wages likely to keep workers near a benefit cliff.

Home Health Aide has the highest projected growth of all occupations in Ohio and also...

- the highest rate of over-representation of Black workers. Black workers compose 12% of the Ohio Labor Force and 36% of Home Health Aide workers.
- the highest rate of workers receiving Medicaid at 42%. Thirty-two (32%) of Ohio's Home Health Aides receive SNAP.
- income that only increases 31% between the lowest to the highest wage percentiles.

Manufacturing Laborers, Freight and Material Movers has the highest number of current openings and also...

- 17% of all Laborers, Freight and Material Movers were enrolled in SNAP
- 21% of Laborers, Freight, and Material Movers were enrolled in Medicaid
- 30,574 Ohioans work as Assemblers and Fabricators and 10% are enrolled in SNAP and 16% were enrolled in Medicaid.

Fast Food and Counter Workers has the highest current employment at 119,970 and also...

- at \$22,260, the lowest median income of all occupations
- the second highest percentage workers receiving Medicaid at 35%
- the third highest percentage of workers receiving SNAP at 23%





# Food Service

## Fast Food and Counter Workers

**Wage for Fast Food and Counter Workers in Ohio, by Percentile**  
 The percentile wage estimate is the value of a wage below which a percent of workers fall. At the 90th percentile wage, 90% of Fast Food and Counter Workers earn less than \$13.77



WAGES	10 <sup>TH</sup>	25 <sup>TH</sup>	70 <sup>TH</sup>	90 <sup>TH</sup>
Hourly	\$9.27	\$10.28	\$11.18	\$13.77
Annual	\$19,280	\$21,370	\$23,260	\$28,650

*Bureau of Labor Statistics*

**\$22,260 is the median annual salary and \$11.24 is the mean hourly wage for fast food and counter workers in Ohio**



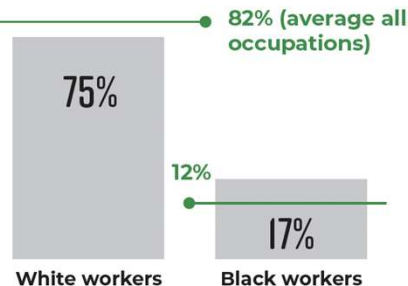
A single person with one child earning less than \$23,808 would be income eligible to receive SNAP benefits



A single person with two children would qualify for SNAP at the 90th percentile wage for this position

82% of labor force in Ohio is white and 12% is Black.

**Black workers are overrepresented in this occupation.**



A higher share of Black fast food and counter workers are eligible for public benefits than their white peers. Even at the highest income percentile, workers in this job who support two or more people are likely to qualify for benefits.

## RANKINGS

### JOB OPENINGS

**Job Openings in Ohio**  
(unknown)

### CURRENT EMPLOYMENT

**Current Employment in Ohio**  
(119,700)

### PROJECTED GROWTH

**Projected growth in Ohio**  
(unknown)



# Manufacturing Laborers, Freight, and Material Movers

**Wage for Laborers, Freight and Material Movers in Ohio, by Percentile**  
 The percentile wage estimate is the value of a wage below which a percent of workers fall. At the 90th percentile, 90% of Laborers, Freight and Material Movers earn less than \$22.90



WAGES	10 <sup>TH</sup>	25 <sup>TH</sup>	70 <sup>TH</sup>	90 <sup>TH</sup>
Hourly	\$11.39	\$14.06	\$18.41	\$22.90
Annual	\$23,680	\$29,240	\$38,830	\$47,630

*Bureau of Labor Statistics*

“A higher share of Black laborers, freight, and material movers are eligible for public benefits than their white peers. Only those earning at the lowest levels of this occupation are likely eligible to receive benefits.”

**\$34,050 is the median annual salary and \$16.75 is the mean hourly wage for labor, freight, and material movers in Ohio**



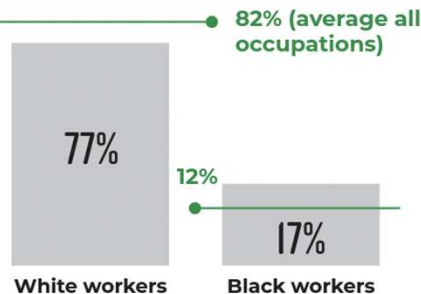
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A single person with two children would qualify for SNAP at the 10th percentile wage for this position

82% of labor force in Ohio is white and 12% is Black.

**Black workers are overrepresented in this occupation.**



## RANKINGS

### #1 JOB OPENINGS

**Job Openings in Ohio**  
17,626 jobs

### #8 CURRENT EMPLOYMENT

**Current Employment in Ohio**  
119,583 jobs

### #2 PROJECTED GROWTH

**Projected growth in Ohio**  
600 jobs



# Healthcare Support Staff Home Health Aide



**Wage for Home Health Aides in Ohio, by Percentile**  
The percentile wage estimate is the value of a wage below which a percent of workers fall. At the 90th percentile wage, 90% of Home Health Aides earn less than \$14.42

WAGES	10 <sup>TH</sup>	25 <sup>TH</sup>	70 <sup>TH</sup>	90 <sup>TH</sup>
Hourly	\$10.71	\$11.05	\$13.89	\$14.42
Annual	\$22,280	\$22,990	\$28,990	\$29,990

*Bureau of Labor Statistics*

**\$24,000 is the median annual salary and \$2.70 is the mean hourly wage for home health aides in Ohio**



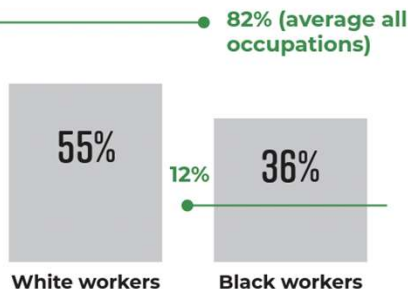
A single person with one child earning less than \$23,808 would be income eligible to receive SNAP benefits



A single person with two children would qualify for SNAP at the 75th percentile wage for this position

82% of labor force in Ohio is white and 12% is Black.

**Black workers are overrepresented in this occupation.**



A higher share of Black home health aides are eligible for public benefits than their white peers. Even at the 75th income percentile, home health aides who support two or more people are likely to qualify for benefits.

## RANKINGS

**#5 JOB OPENINGS**

**Job Openings in Ohio**  
9,025 jobs

**#13 CURRENT EMPLOYMENT**

**Current Employment in Ohio**  
56,510 jobs

**#1 PROJECTED GROWTH**

**Projected growth in Ohio**  
1,725 jobs

# Conclusions

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- 1. Job-creation efforts are important but so are efforts to improve existing jobs.**
- 2. Receiving public benefits is not a proxy for not working or wanting to work.**
- 3. We should reduce employer reliance on public subsidies so workers can thrive.**
- 4. We need better data about which public workforce investments are working and for whom.**

## Next Steps

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1. Explore the impact of race and occupational clustering on low-wage workers receiving SNAP and Medicaid. Identify public policy opportunities to better support these workers.
2. Highlight Ohio's quality employers working to improve their occupations and workplaces and help share learning from those employers across the state.
3. Explore Ohio's major workforce investments like the Tech Cred program to better understand the data that is available and to identify if and how it's benefitting front-line workers with data disaggregated by race.





# WORKER **VOICES**

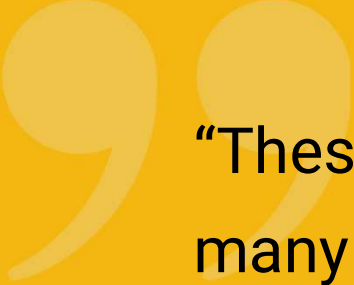
# The Worker Voices Project

## Background

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- **What:** The Worker Voices Project aims to share the perspective of workers and jobseekers to better understand their experiences navigating the labor market during the pandemic and in recovery.
- **Who:** The project reached out to low-wage workers and individuals without a four-year college degree, as well as jobseekers and clients enrolled in workforce or training programs.
- **How:** Led by the Atlanta and Philadelphia Fed, this project engaged with each regional bank to host **20 virtual focus groups** with **175 total participants** from May-September 2022. These participants represent 33 states and 147 zip codes across the United States.





“These past two years, I've been laid off from work many times due to the COVID pandemic. I was interested in the title, ‘The worker's voice,’ because it makes me think we have a voice, the voice of those who are not heard. And I felt the urge to share my experience with other people.”

- Worker Voices Participant



# The Worker Voices Project

## Qualitative Research

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In 2022, Federal Reserve researchers conducted focus groups across the U.S. with workers and job seekers without a four-year degree to seek answers to the following questions:

- What were workers' experiences with employment at the onset of the pandemic and during the economic recovery?
- Do these workers and job seekers believe that they are benefiting from strong labor market conditions and experiencing greater economic stability?
- What barriers persist and prevent them from returning to and then remaining in the labor market?
- How are they changing what they expect from a job, and how do changing expectations inform the choices they make around work going forward?



## Key Findings



Complex calculations about health risk, family demands, and financial needs during the pandemic changed how many workers navigate the labor market.



The tight labor market has not benefited all workers equally.



Workers expressed enhanced expectations of job quality.



Many workers are reinventing themselves through skill development and self-investment to change their economic opportunities.



# Complex Calculations

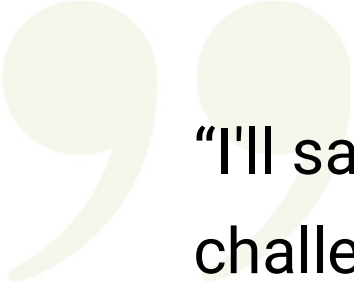


Workers in this study weighed complex choices around employment, often balancing risks of financial instability against health and safety concerns, caregiving demands, and other barriers. Their comments reflected the mental health impacts these stressors had on their work & family lives. Many workers described how these traumatic and scary experiences fundamentally changed how they evaluate employment opportunities and affect how they navigate the labor market.

## Themes included:

- Job insecurity and financial precarity
- Health and safety concerns
- Pandemic exacerbated barriers
- Increased mental stress





“I'll say for me, it wasn't really easy. It was very challenging, because ... I was very concerned for my health and for the health of my child. ... I was also very scared because I thought maybe I could lose my job and I wasn't going to be able to provide the necessary means for my children. And it was a very tough and challenging moment for me.”

– Worker Voices Participant



# Labor Market Disparities



The tight labor market may not have benefited all workers equally. Respondents in this study described their experiences with heavy workloads and increased burnout, and also spoke of struggling to find employment, even in a time of significant job availability.

## Themes included:

- Job search challenges
- Labor shortages and experiences with burnout



Full report at [fedcommunities.org](https://www.fedcommunities.org)



WORKER VOICES



“I've probably put in for the last three months about, I would say, 80 to 100 applications, and so since I haven't been able to find a job... I've been pulled in for interviews and not selected because I'm not what they're looking for.”

– Worker Voices Participant





## Expectations for Quality Jobs



Workers shifted their expectations of jobs and are seeking higher-quality employment opportunities. Participants spoke about job stability, agency, dignity, wages proportional to their job responsibilities, and flexibility as aspects of what they now expect in a good job.

### Themes included:

- Stable employment
- Agency, dignity and value in work
- Wages and compensation
- Flexibility and work-life balance







“We want certain benefits, we want certain hours, certain schedules, and before the pandemic we were not like that. That is, what they gave us, we accepted because we need[ed] the work. And after the pandemic we realized ... work sometimes needs us more.”

– Worker Voices Participant







## Investing in Themselves



Participants are actively reinventing themselves to achieve better employment opportunities, investing in their skills in new and traditional ways through formal, informal, and self-directed learning and are exploring entrepreneurship as a means to achieve economic opportunity. Motivated to find better employment opportunities that meet their expectations of economic security and stability, participants focused on economic mobility in the near term through higher-paying job opportunities to secure economic stability in the long run.

### Themes included:

- Formal, informal and self-directed learning
- Self-employment aspirations





“I'm trying to transition to software development. I'm going into tech, going to working remotely. I feel like there's more [job] security in that area. So, I've been taking some tutorials. It's not been easy, but I'm still pushing through.”

– Worker Voices Participant



# Worker Voices Project



## Considerations Going Forward

The workers who participated in this research provided nuanced perspectives to allow us to better understand the experiences of those in low-wage jobs in the labor market. The project makes the case for additional research going forward, particularly looking into if the trends identified are cyclical or structural. At the same time, these findings are relevant to understanding the ways in which non-degree workers navigate economic shocks, their definitions of job quality, and the methods by which workers are investing in their skills and reinventing themselves for the future.





“And I think during the pandemic – it kind of flipped the tables a little bit. ... I know that I can bring a lot to the table. Are you going to uphold your end of the half as an employer? So at least for me, it gave me a different perspective of ... don't settle for less.”

– Worker Voices Participant

# Target Audiences


## Value to Stakeholders

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Who is the target audience for this research and what value does it provide to stakeholders?

- **Employer and Business Intermediaries:** Understand issues that prevent workers from pursuing or remaining in jobs.
- **Workforce Development Intermediaries and Service Providers:** Provides insights into workers expectations and needs related to employment and training pathways.
- **Policy Makers:** Offers insight into worker behavior and barriers preventing long-term attachment to employment.
- **Economic and Labor Market Research:** Qualitative insight adds nuance and context to labor market data and raises questions on structural shifts in worker behavior with employment.





“The truth to me what caught my attention is the title, The Voice of the Worker, because on few occasions the voice of the worker is heard, normally the voice of the companies, of the large companies, of the losses that these companies are having and not the worker himself who is the one who makes those companies grow.”

– Worker Voices Participant

# THANK YOU

Full report: [Worker Voices: Shifting Perspectives and Expectations on Employment \(fedcommunities.org\)](https://www.fedcommunities.org/worker-voices)

Questions contact: Sarah Miller, [sarah.miller@atl.frb.org](mailto:sarah.miller@atl.frb.org)

