Policy Matters Ohio

PRESS RELEASE

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Union representation increased nationally, declined in Ohio

May Day report examines recent labor data

While union membership nationally ticked up in 2025, Ohio moved in the opposite direction. A new analysis from Policy Matters Ohio shows that union representation in Ohio fell by half a percentage point from 2024 to 2025 — a decline that was worse than in nearly every other state.

Nationally, unions represented 16.5 million workers in 2025, the highest number in 16 years. Workers across the country—especially younger workers—are turning to unions to secure better wages, safer workplaces, and a stronger voice on the job. In Ohio, however, those gains have failed to materialize.

“Union representation remains higher in Ohio than the national average, but the gap is closing—and not in a good way,” said the report’s author, Heather Smith, who researches work and wage policy. “The tight labor market that drove wage growth after the pandemic has loosened. That means workers need more bargaining power at work, to protect hard-won gains in wages and benefits — particularly at this time of high costs. Ohio is moving in the wrong direction.”

“Union representation has significant benefits for working people, most noticeably in their paychecks,” Smith said. “On average, workers represented by a union are paid 14.2% more than non-union workers nationwide. For a union-represented worker earning $30 an hour, that wage premium adds up to more than $7,500 per year. Unions also help reduce racial and gender pay gaps and improve access to benefits like health insurance and paid leave.”

The decline in Ohio’s union representation was driven almost entirely by losses among men, reflecting national representation downturns in traditionally union-dense industries like manufacturing, mining, and transportation. Meanwhile, women in Ohio saw modest gains in union representation, paralleling increased representation in healthcare, social assistance, and educational services—sectors where workers have been organizing and winning recognition.

“On this May Day, Policy Matters Ohio is calling on policymakers to stand up for working people and protect workers’ rights to organize, bargain collectively, and secure fair pay,” Smith said. “That includes blocking recent Ohio legislation that weakens labor protections, banning captive-audience meetings, and ensuring newly organized workers can reach a first contract in a timely manner.”

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