Policy Matters Ohio

PRESS RELEASE

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Ohio working families pay the cost of legislative inaction

Consequences include low wages, a childcare crisis, and lack of paid leave

Ohio workers produce the wealth that powers the state's economy, but legislators make policy primarily to benefit corporations and the well-connected wealthy. As a result, too many Ohioans cannot afford the basics, recover from economic shocks, secure childcare, or take time away from work to care for themselves or their families.

Policy Matters Ohio's annual Labor Day report, the *State of Working Ohio,* finds that these challenges are not inevitable. They stem from decades of policy choices that have suppressed wages, weakened worker bargaining power, and underfunded public systems.

"Ohioans are working hard, but legislators have allowed — and in some ways created — an economy where working people can't get ahead," said Ali Smith, lead author of the report. "The results are plain as day, in wages that don't keep up with rising prices, childcare costs that push parents out of the workforce, an unemployment system that excludes too many workers, and the lack of paid leave when families need it most. These are not isolated problems. They are the results of policymakers that fail to put working people first."

Across five key areas, the report finds that Ohio's $11 minimum wage remains too low to meet the cost of living in any Ohio county; the state's median wage declined in 2025 as productivity continued to outpace worker compensation; childcare barriers cost Ohio an estimated $5.48 billion annually; workers lose an estimated $2.32 billion each year because they lack paid family and medical leave; and lawmakers are considering reducing unemployment benefits even though Ohio's system remains underfunded and excludes many low-wage workers.

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"The evidence points to the same conclusion again and again: Ohio workers, families, businesses, and communities are paying the price for legislative inaction," Smith said. "Lawmakers have the tools to change course by raising wages, strengthening worker bargaining power, investing in childcare, protecting unemployment compensation, and establishing paid family and medical leave. The question is not whether solutions exist. It's whether legislators will act.

A summary of the report's findings is available here. The full report is here. Policy Matters research staff are available for interviews; contact Communications Director Ben Stein at 304-685-8354 or bstein@policymattersohio.org.