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NEW REPORT: While Essential Workers Are Protecting Ohio, Ohio Is Failing Essential Workers

Concrete Steps Needed to Show Real Respect for Essential Work

Cleveland, OH – Three out of every ten workers in Ohio perform essential jobs that literally keep us alive and our communities functioning. Still, according to a [new report](#) from Policy Matters Ohio and Essential Ohio, **essential workers' median pay is 12.9% less than that of workers in nonessential jobs**. Meanwhile, essential workers' risk of contracting COVID and bringing it home is far greater.

“Ohio’s essential workers have shown up throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to do the work that has gotten us through the crisis so far,” said **Michael Shields, report author and researcher with Policy Matters Ohio**. “It’s time for Ohio policymakers to show up for them, with safe workplaces, pay that dignifies their vital work, and a voice on the job.”

There was no downtime for **Sandra Ellington, a janitor at Cleveland-Hopkins Airport and leader with SEIU Local 1**, when the COVID lockdowns started in 2020. She and her colleagues continued to go to work, and most of them eventually contracted COVID, including Sandra.

“Whether I got it from the RTA, traveling to work, or right on the job, COVID hit me and my coworkers hard,” said **Ellington**. Recovery took most of her sick leave, and she still has lingering effects from the disease. “As a city worker, I have health care and sick time, but I think everyone should have that. We need to look at the whole picture. We work and then we go home and clean our own homes too. I want people to know we take pride in our work and we just want them to realize we are human beings.”

“If we are all in this together, then we need to be ‘all in’ for Ohio’s essential workers,” said **Laura Nadal, Community Organizer for Essential Ohio and Justice for Migrant Women**. “Ohio communities are receiving \$11 billion in federal American Rescue Plan dollars. The state, and every local government should use some of its money to fund hazard pay for frontline essential workers, as well as paid sick leave and healthcare. And Congress should enact a path to citizenship for immigrants immediately.”

Shields and Ellington will join Grace Heffernen of the Northeast Ohio Worker Center on Tuesday, July 20 at noon in Cleveland for a “City Club on the Square” forum about “The Future of Essential Work.” Register to attend or watch the event online [here](#).

The report reveals how deeply ingrained inequity is within Ohio’s essential jobs. COVID has made this long-standing inequity even deadlier.

- While men and women are equally likely to work essential jobs, women work more of the lowest paid and highest exposure jobs.
- Ohioans of color hold more than their share of essential jobs. Black men are 20% more likely to be in essential jobs than white men; Black women are 55% more likely to hold these positions than white women.
- Ohioans of color are paid less than their white counterparts in essential and nonessential industries.
- Ohio's food and agriculture workers--the people who literally put food on our tables--are paid less than a poverty wage.
- Undocumented immigrants are a key part of Ohio's essential workforce, yet immigration policy puts them in a state of precarity that reduces their perceived power and earnings.
- Over 70% of undocumented essential workers have [lived in the U.S. for at least 10 years](#); 67% live with at least one U.S. citizen.

The report outlines clear, achievable solutions so that all working people can live happy, healthy lives.

- Being represented by a union means 23% higher pay for Ohio essential workers (and 20% higher pay for workers in nonessential jobs, across all industries).
- American Rescue Plan funds can be used for hazard pay in essential occupations.
- We can increase pay rates and access to paid sick leave and health care across the board.
- Congress can create a path to citizenship for essential workers and other immigrants who are also essential parts of U.S. families, communities, and workplaces. This will bring stability and better wages and working conditions to these integral members of Ohio communities.

Said **Mónica Ramirez, Founder and President of Justice for Migrant Women**: “The COVID-19 pandemic has pulled back the curtain and reminded the world of the importance of our essential workers. This report's findings are alarming and unacceptable. Essential workers in Ohio have courageously continued to provide for their communities and serve vital functions that are essential to our livelihood and well-being, oftentimes at the expense of their own financial stability, health, and time with their families. They deserve the dignity of a fair and reasonable wage, along with the proper security, benefits and protections for their work that they are entitled to.”

Read the report, “Essential in Ohio,” at: <https://bit.ly/July2021EOH>.

#EssentialOH is powered by ABLE, Justice for Migrant Women, the Ohio Immigrant Alliance, Cleveland Jobs with Justice, La Conexión, Policy Matters, Cincinnati Interfaith Workers Center, and Central Ohio Worker Center.

[Essential Ohio](#) is part of a national campaign, [Always Essential](#).
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