

Topline message

Everyone deserves both to be healthy and to have financial security. Government works best when it steps up to support all people – no matter what they look like or how much money they make – during difficult times. Ohio’s leaders have allowed our unemployment compensation system to fall short of that standard. Gov. DeWine and Ohio lawmakers can make it work for everyone who needs it by permanently expanding eligibility, helping employers save jobs through the work share program, and making sure people who can’t return to work due to real and reasonable safety concerns, lack of child care options, or other COVID-19 issues, maintain unemployment compensation support.

Supporting message 1:

Gov. DeWine closed down businesses like restaurants to stop the spread of COVID-19, but many of the laid-off employees, won’t qualify for state unemployment support under traditional state rules. Policymakers can change the eligibility rules so all Ohioans who work at least 20 hours per week for 20 weeks will get help if they need it.

Some supportive facts

- Under Ohio law, working people who average pay of less than \$269 per week – like many of the waitresses and waiters – are ineligible for state UC benefits.
- Black Ohioans and women are more likely to be paid at or near the minimum wage , so are more likely to be excluded from unemployment support.
- Ohio law excludes drivers like those at Uber and Lyft. Other so called “gig workers” are not eligible for regular Ohio unemployment compensation benefits because Ohio law wrongly classifies them as independent contractors.
- Many working people who have been misclassified by their employers as independent contractors should be eligible but aren’t.

Supporting message 2:

People – especially working people – are the backbone of the Ohio economy. Instead of putting people first by enforcing workplace safety rules, Gov. DeWine encouraged employers to report employees that haven’t returned to work as the economy reopens – even if employees have reasonable COVID-19 related issues- like health conditions that make workplace safety a concern or shuttered child care.

- After pushback from Policy Matters, the Ohio Poverty Law Center and even hackers who broke into the site for employers to report workers – the DeWine Administration is reconsidering the policy.

- Gov DeWine said workplace safety standards that protect working people will be largely “self-enforced”

Supporting message 3:

Ohio’s shared work program is an example of how government can tackle problems and support working people and employers. Ohio’s leaders should promote it to protect more Ohioans’ jobs and financial security during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Some supportive facts:

- In 2013, we worked with Ohio legislators to pass SharedWork Ohio which allows employers to avoid layoffs by reducing employees’ hours. Employees get unemployment compensation proportionate to their reduced hours, and continue receive health and other benefits. Employers retain their employees and avoid hiring and training costs when demand recovers.
- As of May 7, 511 Ohio employers are using SharedWork Ohio, covering 24,247 employees.
- ODJFS has approved 827 plans, up from just 67 on March 15. Another 95 plans covering 2,819 employees are pending.

Supporting message 4:

Ohio and federal policymakers put business over people when they chose to underfund the unemployment compensation system, so now, as more than 1 million Ohioans have filed for support, many are still waiting to get help that will keep food on the table and a roof over their head.

Some supportive facts:

- Ohio policymakers kept employers taxes low, while maintaining a stringent earnings standard that meant fewer unemployed workers qualify for UC benefits than in most other states.
- Congress should boost funding for ODJFS and its counterparts across the country to administer the UC program. It should also maintain expanded benefit levels and extend benefits as long as unemployment remains high.
- Going forward, Ohio lawmakers should make employers pay more into the system so that our fund, which has not met federal solvency standards since 1974, is well supported.