

Mainers take pride in their work and they work hard. That should be enough to sustain our families. But the realities of work today don't fulfill that basic expectation.

Despite low unemployment levels and recent economic growth, too many Maine workers and families struggle to make ends meet. Middle-class jobs are being replaced by low-wage jobs and greater instability. Income gains are limited or nonexistent for a significant share of Maine workers while women and people of color continue to earn less than white men.



What are the five basic components of a good job?

- **Living wages**
- **Stable, secure employment**
- **Benefits that promote health and well-being**
- **Access to stable, dignified retirement**
- **Accessibility to anyone qualified and able to work**

Work often pays too little, is too unpredictable, and doesn't promote workers' well-being. This comes at a cost to all of us in the form of greater inequality, and greater demand for public services, and is a drag on the economy.

Mainers can build an economy that delivers on the promise of good jobs. Doing so will improve quality of life for workers and create a stronger economy.

When jobs pay higher wages, workers spend that money on groceries, health and child care, and other local goods and services. When workers have better access to affordable, quality health care, they are more productive. When workers have stable employment, they can strike a work-life balance that allows them to pursue higher education or otherwise improve their job prospects. All these factors can kick-start a more dynamic, inclusive economy.

In State of Working Maine 2018, the Maine Center for Economic Policy examines the changing nature of work for Mainers, and offers solutions to make good jobs the norm and make the economy more dynamic and inclusive. Key policy recommendations include:

Solutions for a livable income

A clear indicator of a job's quality is the income it provides. With more than one-third of Maine households earning less than a livable income and many salaried workers — including those with low wages — ineligible for overtime pay, more must be done to ensure families can afford the basics, weather emergencies, and plan for the future. Continued increases to the minimum wage, guaranteed equal pay across race and gender lines, and expanded access to overtime pay for more Maine workers will ensure that jobs pay good wages to hardworking Mainers.

Solutions for job stability

Mainers are more likely than other Americans to work in part-time and/or seasonal jobs, while scheduling volatility leads to erratic incomes that deny Mainers the security of knowing they'll make ends meet. Guaranteed fair scheduling and decreased barriers to programs that stabilize families, such as unemployment and food assistance, will go a long way to providing employment stability and predictability to Mainers' lives.

Solutions for Mainers' well-being

A healthy workforce is a productive workforce. But the inability for many workers to take even a single day of paid sick leave results in Mainers losing \$115 million in wages every year. The lack of paid family and medical leave puts workers, particularly working women, in the difficult position of choosing between their livelihoods and the care of their families, and contributes to worse outcomes for children and families. Universal paid sick leave and universal paid family and medical leave will improve economic and health outcomes for Maine families.



Maine can build a more dynamic, inclusive economy by recommitting to the fundamentals of what makes a good job — and by enacting and enforcing policies that make good jobs the norm, rather than the exception.

Solutions for a dignified retirement

The median Social Security payment in Maine provides little more than a subsistence income to seniors. Still, nearly one in three working seniors has no retirement savings or plan other than Social Security, and persistent gender and racial pay inequity means women and people of color are less likely to have secure retirement than white men. By strengthening Social Security and implementing a state supplement to Social Security benefits, Mainers can guarantee that workers who pay into the system their whole lives have access to a stable, comfortable retirement.

Solutions to reduce discrimination

Mainers with a history of incarceration, the long-term unemployed, and workers suffering mental health issues all face unique barriers to fully participating in our economy. Rehabilitation certificates, a reduced role for criminal background checks in job applications, and a system to expunge outdated criminal records will give Mainers who have served their time a chance to reintegrate with society. Expansions of supported employment and increased funding for job training will help make sure everyone has a chance to succeed in a growing economy.

Solutions to give workers a voice

Strong unions are associated with better wages and benefits, safer working conditions, and less discrimination, but it's become harder for workers to exercise their freedom of association and organize unions. Increased penalties for employers who suppress workers' right to organize, the creation of wage boards, and reforms to modernize federal labor laws will restore workers' constitutional rights and improve economic conditions for union members and nonmembers alike.

It is time to get back to the fundamentals of what makes a good job and to recognize the role that public policy can play in building an inclusive economy that results in better outcomes for all Maine families and communities.

Doing so requires policymakers to appreciate the challenges that far too many hardworking Mainers face and to take actions that result in work arrangements that pay enough to support families, are more predictable, and are more likely to promote worker well-being now and in the future.



By adopting the policy recommendations in State of Working Maine 2018, our state can deliver on the promise of good jobs, secure families, and thriving communities.

The Maine Center for Economic Policy is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit research and policy organization dedicated to improving the economic well-being of low- and moderate-income Mainers. The full State of Working Maine 2018 report can be found at <https://bit.ly/2FpTf8O>.