



State of Working Maine 2021

COVID-19 Reveals Urgency to Protect and Empower Maine Workers

November 2, 2021

The rapid spread of the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in some of the most dramatic economic shifts in the last century. It simultaneously created new challenges and exacerbated existing ones.

Policymakers must learn from the pandemic in crafting new policy that improves conditions and supports, and seize the opportunities in rebuilding to create a fairer economic system.

Figures in Focus

50 percent more

Likelihood of in-person workers to contract COVID-19, compared to remote workers

2 times more

Likelihood of Black Mainers to contract COVID-19, compared to white Mainers.

1 in 4

Maine adults unable to meet their weekly household expenses during the pandemic

25,000

Mainers were out of work due to a lack of child care as of August 2021



Greater Supports Needed to Protect Frontline Workers

How workers fared during the COVID-19 pandemic depended greatly on whether they were able to work remotely. Public health measures included limiting in-person work, but a majority of Maine workers continued to work in-person during the pandemic — and were 50% more likely to contract COVID-19.

Due to historic and current-day discrimination, "frontline" workers in high-risk, low-benefit industries are more likely to be women and people of color, putting them at disproportionately higher risk. As of September 2021, Black Mainers were two times more likely to contract COVID-19 as white Mainers.



Elected leaders should implement the following policy prescriptions to improve conditions for frontline workers now and in the future:

- Increase the scope of Maine's paid time off law to include all workers
- Empower workers through greater workplace protections
- Encourage and facilitate the formation of unions in the workplace

Program Improvements Needed to Adequately Support Workers

The unexpected onset of the COVID-19 pandemic exposed many flaws in our economic system and made it clear just how vulnerable many Maine workers were. Policymakers must learn from the pandemic and recession and ensure nobody is left behind:

- Continue to improve Maine's UI program and overhaul unemployment insurance law at the federal level
- Commit to fully funding universal free school meals in future budgets
- Continue to support Medicaid expansion and explore ways to increase eligibility

Investments in Child Care, Equity, and Reforms to Workplace Practices Needed to Ensure Full Recovery

For Maine's economy to recover from COVID-19, workers must be able to return to jobs that ensure they can provide for themselves and their families. This can be achieved through laws that improve working conditions and programs that remove barriers to work:

- Implement a livable minimum wage of \$15 per hour by 2025
- Reform scheduling practices through "fair workweek" laws
- Institute a statewide paid family leave program and establish a system of publicly subsidized child care
- Invest in programs to facilitate hiring people of color and immigrants, who still face discrimination in Maine's labor market
- Enforce existing anti-discrimination laws

This fact sheet is based on a report by MECEP economic policy analyst James Myall. For the full report and citations, visit mecep.org.