



State of Working Maine 2022

Recognizing the Value of Labor

Figures in Focus

2.4

open jobs existed for every unemployed Mainer in July 2022

19,000

"prime age" Mainers are missing from the workforce compared to 2001

1 in 3

"prime-age" Mainers is experiencing COVID symptoms at least 3 months after first being infected

85 percent

of child care centers in Maine are experiencing staffing shortages, low wages the biggest barrier to recruitment

Supporting a revival of worker power

Following the economic disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, workers are reevaluating their options and switching careers at a record pace. Set against the backdrop of the life-threatening pandemic, the large number of layoffs in the spring and summer of 2020, followed by an urgent rehiring in 2021, encouraged workers to maximize their leverage and obtain work that pays better under less arduous conditions. However, there are limits to the extra bargaining power. As much as worker power has increased, it is still eclipsed by the clout of many corporations and businesses.

Policy recommendations to boost worker power:

- Guarantee Mainers the right to unionize without interference
- Improve the bargaining power of Maine's public sector workers
- Allow agricultural workers to bargain collectively

Too many Mainers are still excluded from work

Despite the historically strong labor market, for reasons including health issues, caregiving responsibilities, lagging opportunities in rural communities, and structural racism, some Mainers still face barriers to participating fully, or at all, in the workforce. Labor market data demonstrate there are jobs available for these Mainers and increasing their ability to work would strengthen Maine's economy without lowering wages for existing workers.

Policy recommendations to help Mainers work:

- Continue public health measures to minimize the spread of COVID-19
- Encourage employers to make accommodations for Long COVID sufferers
- Strengthen access to health care including mental health services
- Develop a comprehensive child care subsidy program
- Continue to fund free college
- Properly enforce anti-discrimination laws



Brandi McNease worked in the food service industry for 20 years. In her most recent position as a trainer for an international restaurant franchise, Brandi sought to improve staff retention by advocating for better pay and working conditions. Read [State of Working Maine 2022](#) to learn more about the experiences of Maine workers

Wage growth undermined by rising inflation

As a result of the strong labor market, many workers in Maine have seen substantial wage increases as employers have offered higher wages to retain existing workers and attract new employees. However, a rapidly rising cost of living has dulled the benefit of these higher wages to workers.

Policy recommendations to boost wages:

- Preserve and expand Maine's minimum wage law
- Ensure direct care support workers are paid adequately
- Require wage transparency on job applications

Working conditions are improving but need more guarantees

Over the past year, Mainers, like other Americans, have engaged in “the great reshuffling.” Recently, both the share of Maine workers quitting their jobs and the share of workers being hired at new positions are the highest in at least two decades. The increase in workers' bargaining power during a tight labor market has raised wages and helped improve conditions in the workplace, but there is more to do to improve other aspects of working life.

Policy recommendations to balance work and home life:

- Create “fair workweek” standards
- Expand existing paid time off law to remove exclusions and protect against retaliation
- Enact a paid family and medical leave program