Every Marylander should have access to a decent job that pays enough to support a family—regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, or any other aspect of their identity. However, the labor market we have today is far from this ideal. Too many jobs offer paltry wages or lack basic protections, and structural barriers stand between many Maryland workers and good jobs.

Maryland has taken some important steps in recent years to build a labor market that works for everyone:

- The state legislature in 2018 passed a law guaranteeing most Maryland workers the right to earn five paid sick and safe days per year. Workers can use these earned days off to see a doctor, recover from an illness, care for a loved one who is sick, or deal with an unsafe situation in their home. Workers covered by this law no longer have to choose between their livelihood and their health, their loved ones, or their safety.
- Lawmakers in 2019 put the state on the path toward a $15 minimum wage by 2025 (2026 for small employers). There is currently nowhere in Maryland where even a single adult working full time and not caring for children can afford a basic living standard on less than $15 per hour. A higher minimum wage will mean better pay for hundreds of thousands of Maryland workers. Working Marylanders of every background will gain from this reform, and women, Latinx workers, and Black workers will see the greatest benefits.

However, our labor market still leaves many workers without enough income to make ends meet, and excludes some from opportunity altogether.
Barriers to Opportunity

- Many of the protections we have put in place for Maryland workers leave thousands of workers out—often because of decades-old, racist political deals. Agricultural workers and tipped workers play an essential role in keeping Maryland’s economy running, but they don’t have the same minimum wage protections as everyone else. People who work at small companies or in certain health and personal care jobs are just vulnerable to illness or domestic violence as anyone else, yet they aren’t eligible to earn paid sick and safe leave.
- Even workers who are covered by Maryland’s workplace protections are not always safe from mistreatment on the job. Employers are allowed to provide incomplete or confusing information that can make it hard for workers to figure out if they are being paid appropriately, or who is responsible if they are not. In some cases, companies are legally allowed to punish or fire employees just for exercising their rights.
- Most Maryland workers are not guaranteed any paid time off to deal with major life events like a new child or a serious illness. Without access to time off, some workers have no choice but to leave their job altogether, meaning that a disruptive event like a major injury or even a joyful event like a new child can short-circuit a person’s career.
- Structural barriers stand between many Maryland workers and decent jobs. Inadequate transportation options can make good jobs out of reach for many workers, especially those who have been pushed into underinvested neighborhoods by racist housing policy. For some parents, the sky-high cost of child care can make it more expensive to pursue a career than to care for their kids at home. Many employers—either by choice or because of counterproductive licensing requirements—won’t even consider applicants who were previously incarcerated, regardless of their qualifications.

We all benefit when the labor market works for working people—and we all suffer when it doesn’t. Because of unjust policy choices and structural barriers, that suffering falls more heavily on some Marylanders than on others. In times of growth as well as downturns, Black workers face significantly higher unemployment rates—the share of the labor force actively looking for a job but unable to find one—than their white counterparts:

- During the relatively strong economy of 2019, on average 4.8% of Black workers in Maryland were unable to find a job, compared to 3.3% of white workers. Between January and March 2020—largely before the pandemic’s economic impact was felt—6.1% of Black workers in Maryland were unemployed, compared to 2.3% of white workers. Unemployment estimates for other racial and ethnic groups are not available because of insufficient data.
While significant problems remain in Maryland’s labor market, there are steps policymakers can take to address them. Extending worker protections to those currently left out would ensure that everyone can rely on basic standards at their job. Enabling workers to take paid time off to deal with a major life event would ease the stress associated with a new child or a major illness. Requiring employers to consider an applicant’s qualifications rather than past incarceration would make it easier for Marylanders to successfully reenter the community.

Women and workers of color also face greater barriers to getting a job that matches their qualifications and pays at a commensurate level:

- Between 2015 and 2019, 73% of white workers in Maryland who had a four-year degree worked in an occupation that generally requires this level of education. In comparison, 66% of Black workers with a four-year degree, 61% of Latinx workers, and 58% of Indigenous American workers at this level of education had a job that matched their qualifications. This means that workers of color are likely facing additional barriers that keep them out of higher-paying jobs that they would be qualified for based on their level of education. The results is lower pay and less career advancement.
- Even getting a job that matches one’s qualifications doesn’t guarantee fair pay. Among workers with a four-year degree in a job that matched their qualifications, Black, Latinx, and multiracial workers typically took home about 6% less than their white counterparts between 2015 and 2019.
- Across educational levels, women in Maryland are less likely to be employed than their male counterparts. And whether they have a four-year degree or not, women in Maryland take home significantly less than similarly situated men—between 20% less and 28% less, depending on their educational level and occupation.
- These roadblocks can be especially daunting when working in combination. Between 2015 and 2019, a Black woman in Maryland who had a four-year degree and a job that matched this educational level typically took home about 30% less than a similarly situated white man, and only slightly more than a white man with a four-year degree but working in a job that does not require one.

### Policies that Advance Opportunity

![Typical Annual Pay: White Man](image)

![Typical Annual Pay: Black Woman](image)

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As you think about your own experiences in Maryland’s labor market, what challenges do you see? What steps could policymakers take to address those challenges?