

# Lorain County Jobs and Family Service workers entering second week of strike

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Workers for the Lorain County Department of Job and Family Services (JFS) are entering the second week of a strike for better wages, benefits, and working conditions. The 140 workers are members of United Auto Workers Local 2192.

The workers walked off the job and onto the picket line February 18 after contract negotiations with county officials collapsed. With years of soaring inflation, workers' wages—already low—have fallen even further behind.

Workers at JFS administer many benefits, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), or food stamps, and Medicaid. In addition, they handle childcare assistance and Ohio Works First. Workers have reported that their pay is so low that some qualify for the same benefits they administer.

Starting pay can be as low as \$15 an hour, according to strikers, with caseworkers earning just \$18 an hour.

According to publicly available documents, a 2A job classification starts at \$18.21 an hour, reaching a maximum of \$22.33 an hour after nearly seven years' service and good performance reviews. A 5A classification starts at \$22.61, with a maximum pay of under \$30 an hour.

Workers are demanding a 26 percent pay increase over the life of the contract, with the county offering just 4.5 percent in the first year, 3.5 percent in the second, and 4 percent in the third. Even the 26 percent demanded by the strikers amounts to a pay cut, as workers have already lost more than that in recent years due to inflation and rising health care costs.

On Tuesday the UAW filed unfair labor practice charges with the anti-labor National Labor Relations Board, but aside from issuing perfunctory statements of support, has taken no other action to broaden support for the strike.

In comments to the local media, strikers spoke out about

the intolerable conditions they face and expressed their determination to fight.

"I just came back from maternity leave and have to keep my newborn son off the county healthcare because it's far too expensive," Candace MacIntosh, a JFS investigator, told a reporter.

JFS employees have seen their health care premiums rise 50 percent over the past four years.

"Instead," Candace continued, her son "is on Medicaid, the same program we administer. We're authorizing benefits for other people while struggling ourselves."

Lorain County, once a center of U.S. steel production, shipbuilding, and other manufacturing, has seen jobs and incomes decimated by decades of deindustrialization, with at least half of its manufacturing jobs eliminated since the late 1970s. This was carried out with the complicity of the United Steelworkers, the UAW, and other unions that never called a single strike or protest in opposition to mass layoffs.

Over the same period the Democratic Party collaborated with Republicans to gut the social safety net, including Clinton's dismantling of welfare. Child poverty currently stands at roughly 20 percent in the area (2020 U.S. Census), significantly above state and national averages. Median family income is about 10 percent below the U.S. median.

## A growing demand for services

The strike unfolds against the backdrop of ongoing and massive cuts carried out by both Democrats and Republicans at the local, state, and federal levels that are leaving millions without basic necessities.

In 2023 and 2024, the Biden administration cut what

remained of COVID pandemic relief benefits.

The failure of Congress to extend enhanced tax credits for the Affordable Care Act has led to higher costs and at least 8 million people losing their health coverage.

Trump's One Big Beautiful Bill Act slashed \$186 billion from SNAP benefits over 10 years. That amounts to a 20 percent reduction, marking the largest cut in the program's history, according to the Harvard Kennedy School.

In response to the federal cuts, Ohio's legislature and governor have approved changes to SNAP and Medicaid eligibility requirements that will increase the workload on already overburdened JFS employees while forcing tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, off these vital programs.

Under the changes that took effect Feb. 1, people ages 18–64 must generally work 20 hours a week or be engaged in approved training or volunteer work to receive SNAP benefits.

Previously exempt groups—including veterans, people experiencing homelessness, and youth formerly in foster care—are now subject to these requirements. Adults between the ages of 55 and 64, as well as adults with children over the age of 14, are also subject to the rules for the first time.

Simultaneously, changes to Medicaid have been approved by the state of Ohio and are awaiting federal approval, widely expected to be granted.

As of late 2025, nearly 1.4 million Ohio residents relied on SNAP benefits—almost 12 percent of the state's population—and caseworkers throughout the state are continuously processing applications and renewals.

In neighboring Medina County alone, Job and Family Services reported more than 9,000 SNAP recipients and 27,000 Medicaid enrollees, along with thousands of child support cases and protective service responsibilities.

Low pay and increased workloads have already led to a high turnover rate at JFS; over 50 percent of JFS workers have less than two years' service. As these cuts take effect, even greater pressure will be placed on employees.

## **JFS workers across Ohio face rising challenges**

The challenges facing Lorain County workers are not unique. Across Ohio's 88 counties, JFS offices have absorbed growing workloads while funding and staffing

levels have not kept pace. In some counties, administrators have warned that federal changes to how programs like SNAP are financed could cost counties tens of millions of dollars and force layoffs.

These pressures—rising caseloads, flat funding, and complex new administrative demands—create shared conditions across the state.

For workers on the Lorain County picket line, this is not just about a local contract, but about broader solidarity. Their struggles echo across Ohio—from Cuyahoga to Hamilton to Medina counties—and are increasingly seen as part of a larger effort to improve conditions for all JFS workers.

However, the unions that claim to represent them are leaving the workers isolated. There have been no calls by the UAW for coordinated statewide action by JFS workers, let alone a broader mobilization against the ongoing attacks on social programs.

A fighting program of action would win strong support not only from other government employees but also from millions of working-class and low-income families across the state.

The UAW will not adopt such a program. Decades of union-management collaboration have transformed the union apparatus into a direct instrument of corporate management, the Democratic Party, and the capitalist oligarchy. A small army of UAW bureaucrats live high and mighty off workers' dues and income from various joint funds and programs.

According to the union's most recent financial filings, the UAW International employs around 1,000 people, nearly 470 of whom earn more than \$100,000 annually. UAW President Shawn Fain earns \$270,000 annually with other top officers earning similar amounts.

Fain and his fellow bureaucrats fear above all that any serious struggle could slip out of their control and threaten the interests of the employers and financial elite they serve. To win, workers must take matters into their own hands by organizing rank-and-file committees independent of the union and management. These committees must mobilize to break the isolation of the strike, reaching out to public service workers and other workers across Ohio, nationally, and internationally.



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