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Pennsylvania's Essential Workforce is Disproportionately Women and People of Color: Demographics of Pennsylvania's Essential Workers

By: Maisum Murtaza

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The COVID-19 pandemic has put a spotlight on “essential workers” who play a paramount role in keeping our communities afloat. Workers who provide social services, work in grocery stores, keep public transportation running, and work in the healthcare industry are on the front lines of this crisis.

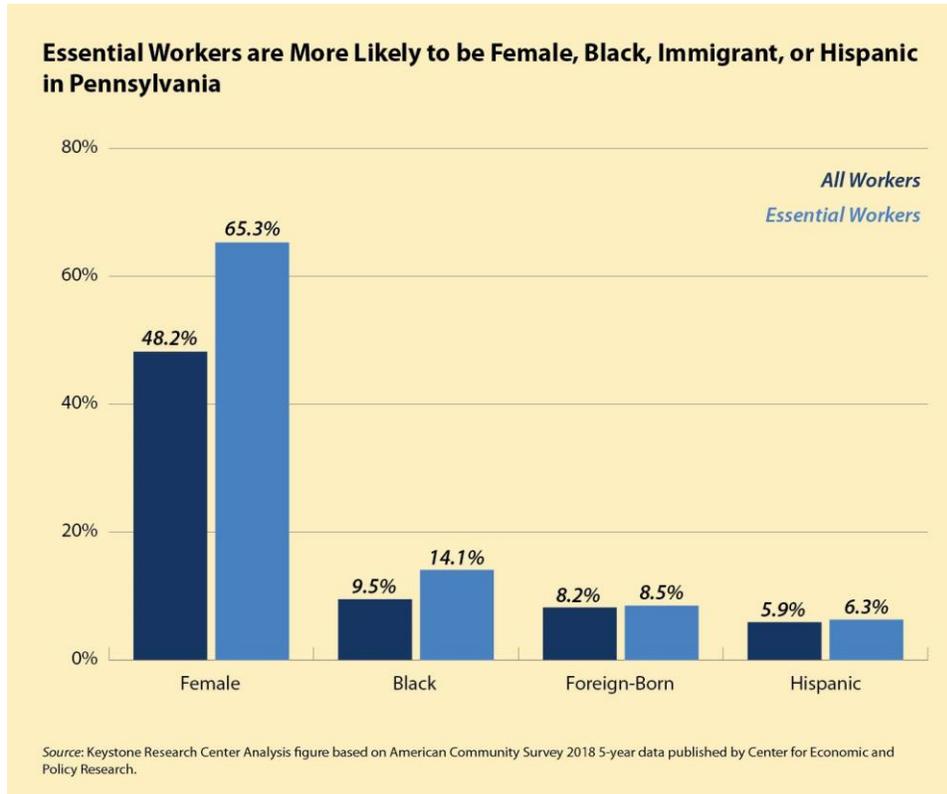
While these workers have always been an integral part of our communities, the shut-down of all non-essential places of work has made it increasingly obvious what services we cannot function without. Regardless of the risks of a pandemic, people still need food, transportation, daily care and cleaning services.

The following Keystone Research Center analysis of essential workers is based on two reports done in tandem by the [New York Fiscal Policy Institute](#) and the [Center for Economic and Policy Research](#). Similar to New York, we find that Pennsylvania's essential workforce is disproportionately likely to be residents who are women, immigrants, Blacks, and Hispanics.

There are actions we must take to ensure the respectful treatment of essential workers during this pandemic and in the future. Unfortunately, the protection and well-being of these workers and their families are not being prioritized in many cases. A disproportionate number of essential workers are supporting their families on low incomes. Healthcare workers in Pennsylvania [are scared](#) due to the lack of protective equipment while many [workers that provide social services](#) must take the risk of going to their offices due to lack of proper telecommuting technology. [Delivery workers](#) all over the country are walking away from work because their employers are not providing proper safety measures.

Pennsylvania State Data

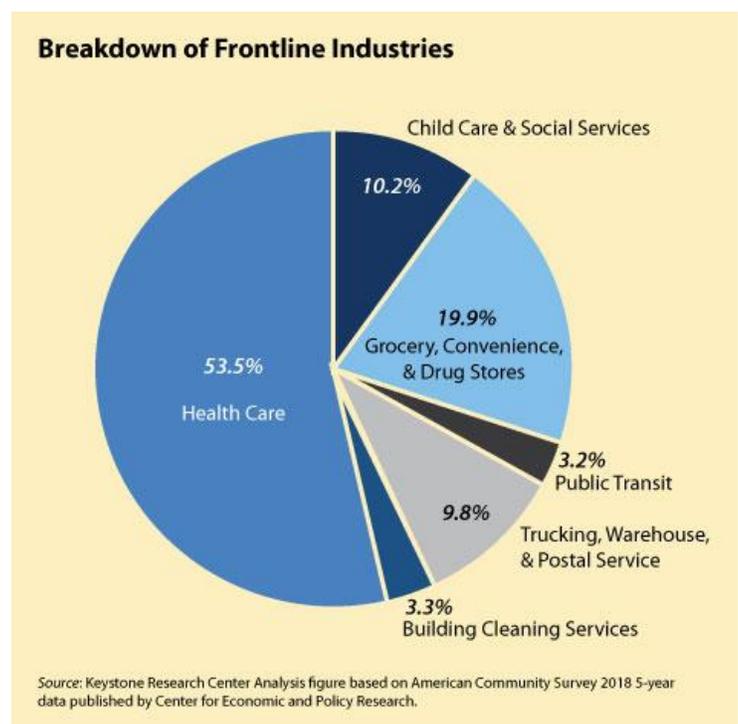
According to data published by the Center for Economic and Policy Research, there are 1.5 million essential workers in Pennsylvania. More than 20 percent of these workers support their families on low incomes of less than 200 percent of the poverty level.



Because of their overrepresentation in health care (77%), child care and social services (84%), women are represented disproportionately in frontline industries. While the share of all jobs in Pennsylvania for women is 48% percent, their representation in frontline industries is 65%.

Black workers make up 14% of essential workers while representing 9.5% of all workers. Hispanic workers and immigrant workers are also slightly overrepresented. Workers with some college (not shown) are also slightly overrepresented: 27% of the overall workforce compared to 32% share of essential workers.

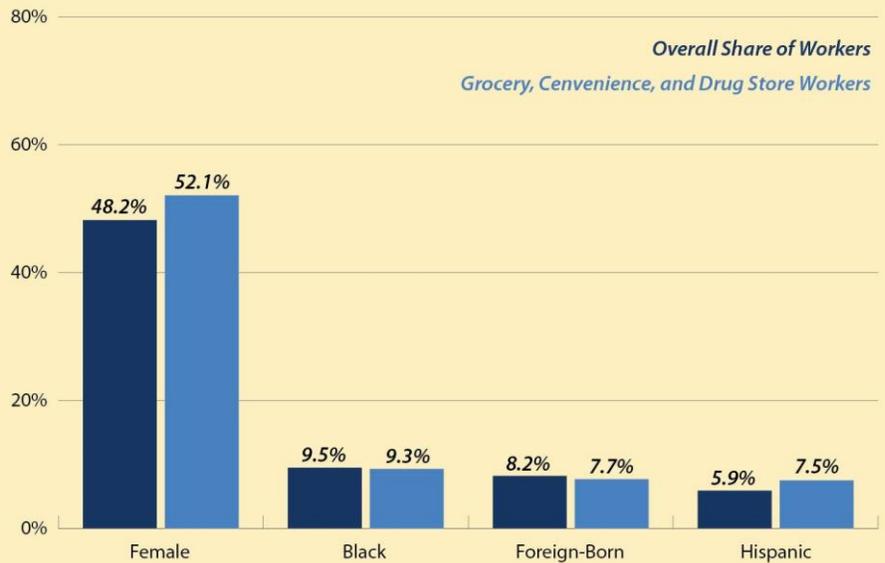
The pie chart is a breakdown of each frontline industry based on the percentage share of employment in each industry. While health care makes up more than half of the employment in Pennsylvania frontline industries, grocery and other stores (19.9%), along with child care (10.2%), hold significant levels of employment as well.



Demographic Breakdown of Frontline Workers by Industry: Grocery, Convenience, and Drug Store Workers

While women in Pennsylvania make up 48% of total workers, they represent 52% of Grocery store, convenience, and drug store workers. Hispanic workers are also over-represented in this industry as they are 5.9% of total workers while representing 7.5% of workers in these stores.

Grocery, Convenience, and Drug Store Employment: Women and Hispanic Workers Over-Represented

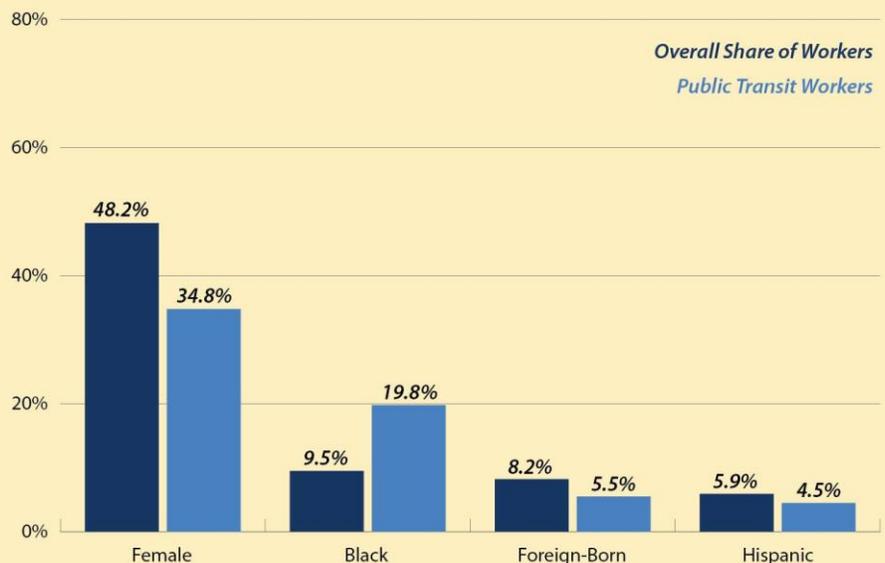


Source: Keystone Research Center Analysis figure based on American Community Survey 2018 5-year data published by Center for Economic and Policy Research.

Public Transportation

While women, foreign-born, and Hispanic workers make up a smaller share of public transportation workers than their overall share, Black workers in Pennsylvania represent almost a fifth of the workers in this industry. The overall share of Black workers is 9.5% and they represent nearly 20% of public transit workers.

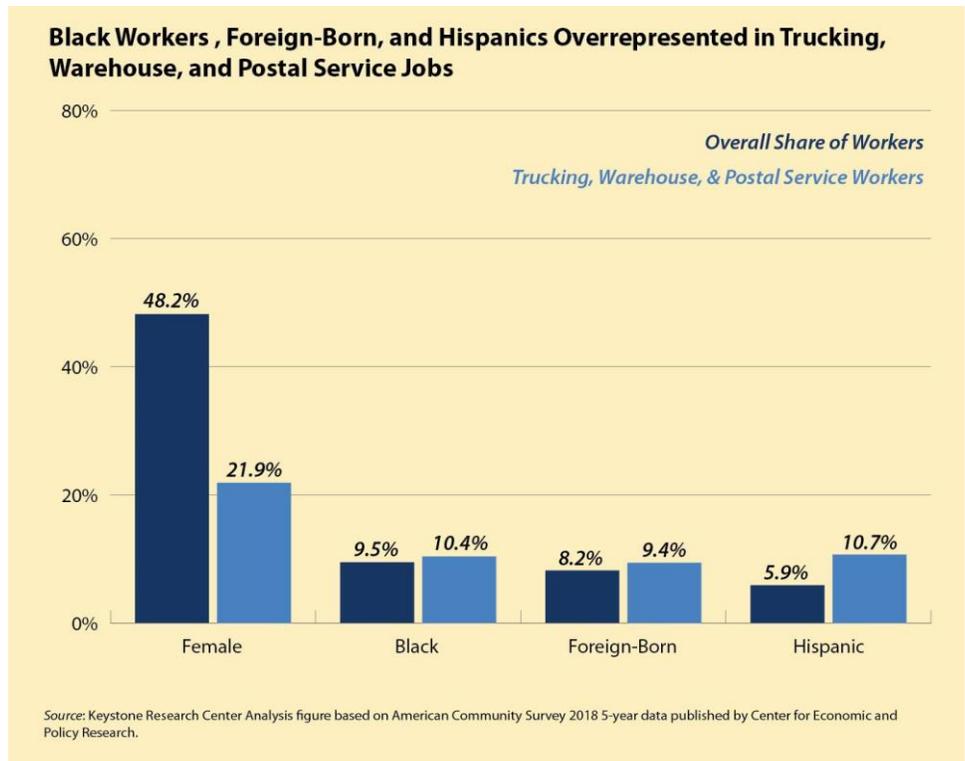
Black Workers Disproportionately Represented in Public Transit



Source: Keystone Research Center Analysis figure based on American Community Survey 2018 5-year data published by Center for Economic and Policy Research.

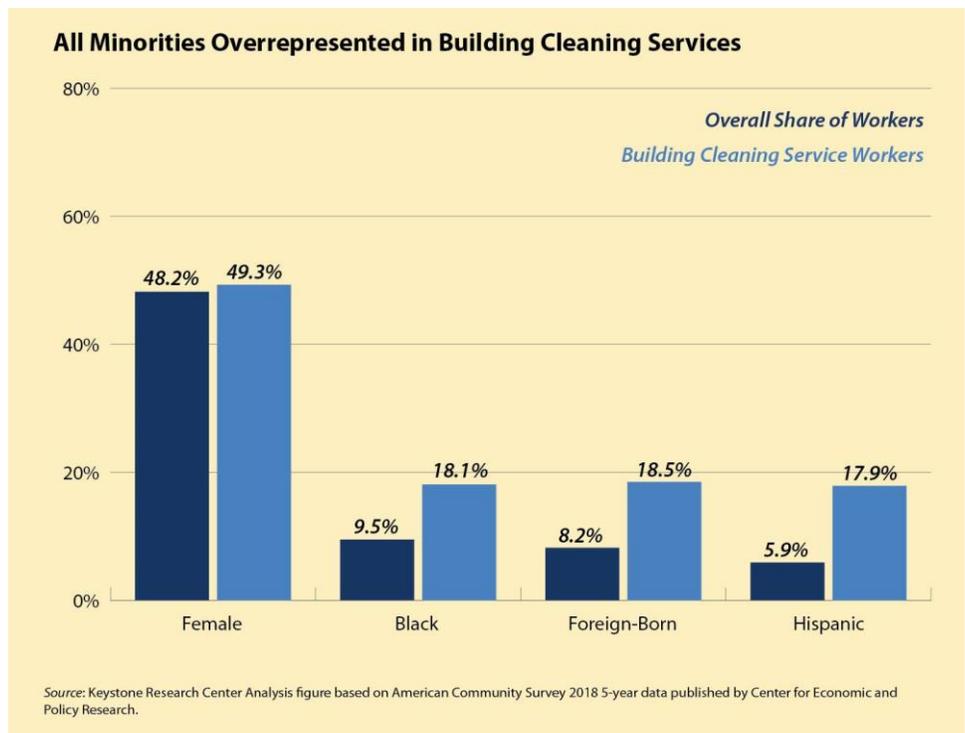
Trucking, Warehouse, and Postal Service Industry

Men make up the majority of trucking, warehouse, and postal service industry workers – women make up only 22% of this workforce. Black workers and foreign-born workers are slightly overrepresented, while Hispanic workers make up nearly twice their share of overall workers in trucking, warehouse, and postal services—6% overall compared to nearly 11% in this workforce.

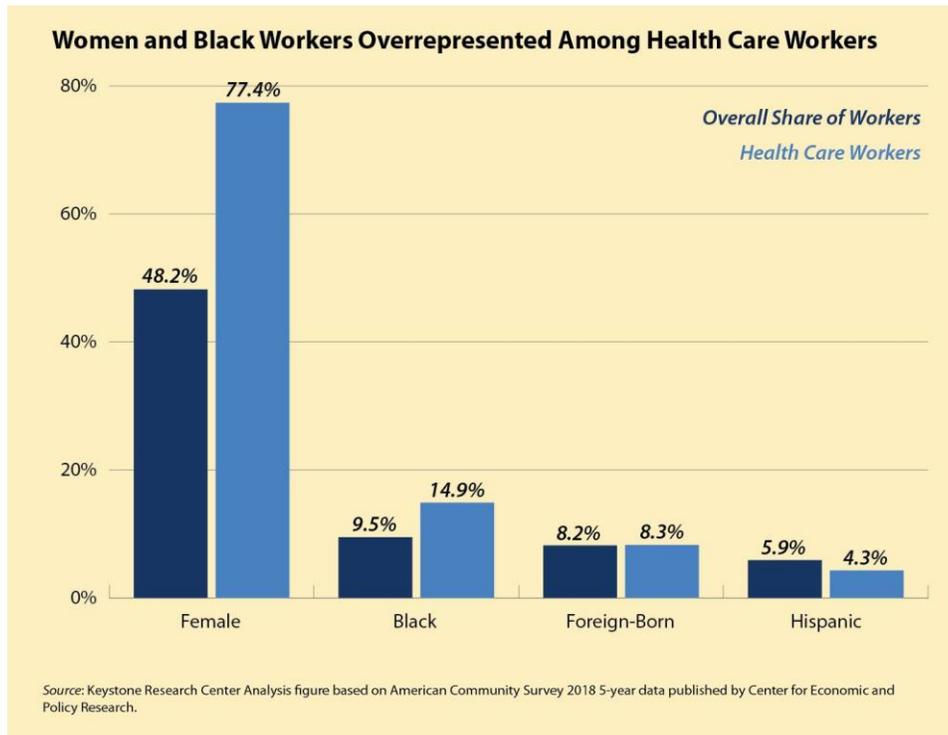


Building Cleaning Services

All four of these groups is overrepresented in building cleaning services. Female workers are only slightly overrepresented. While Black workers are 9.5% of the Pennsylvania workforce, they make up nearly twice that (18%) in the building cleaning services workforce. A similar trend can be seen with the foreign-born population (8.2% compared to 18.5% of the building cleaning services industry). Hispanic workers in this industry make up three times their share of the workforce as a whole.



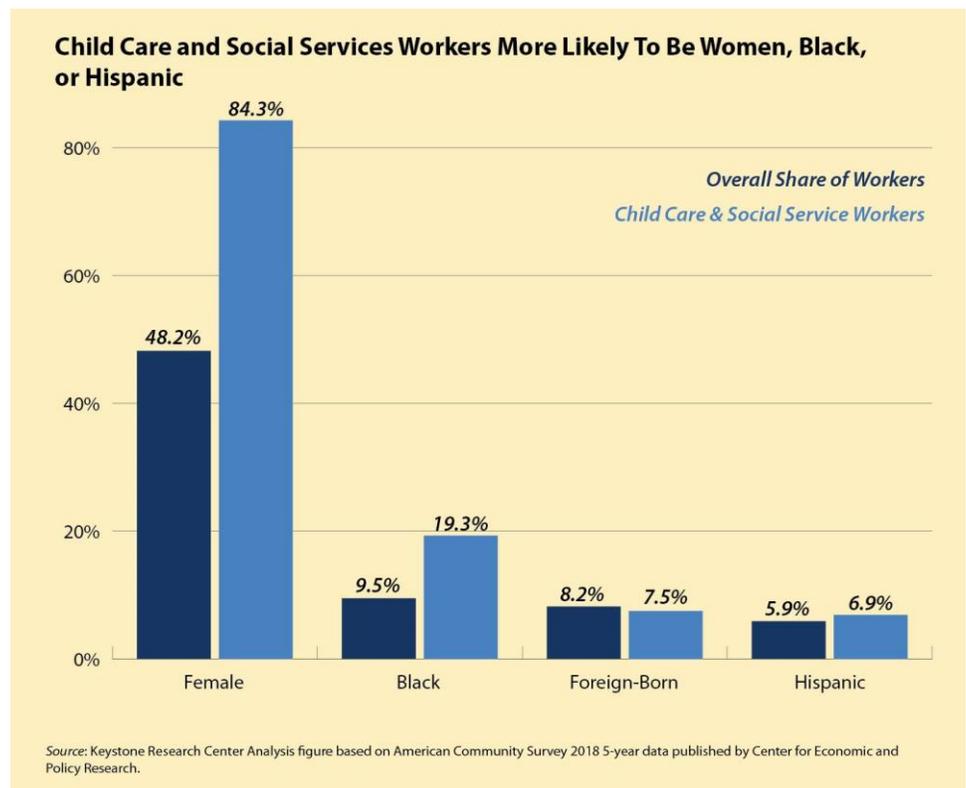
Health Care Industry



Health care is one of the industries where women are vastly overrepresented, making up more than three-fourths (77%) of all health care workers. Black workers represent 15% of workers in this industry.

Child Care and Social Services

Child care and social services are also mostly made up of women who make up 84.3% of workers in the industry. Black workers make up twice their share of overall workers, and Hispanic workers are also slightly overrepresented in child care and social services.

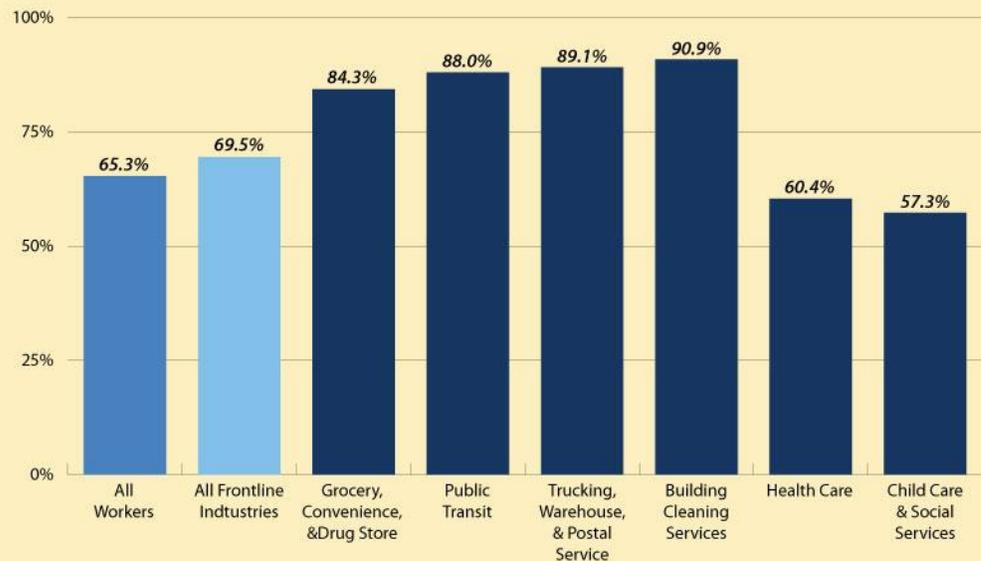


Education Attainment and Income Level

Workers without a college degree make up 65% of workers in frontline industries as a whole. In four out of the six frontline industries, including grocery, convenience and drug stores, public transit, trucking, warehousing and postal service and building cleaning services, those without a college degree are overrepresented. Around 90% of public transit; trucking, warehouse, and postal services; and building cleaning services workers have no college degree.

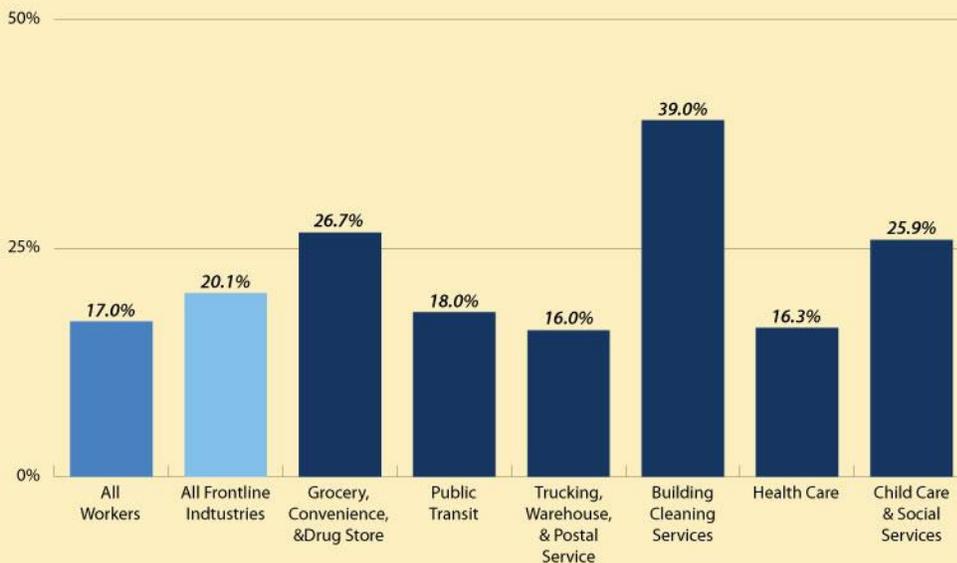
Many frontline industry workers support their families with incomes of less than 200% of the poverty level. Workers with those incomes make up 17% of all workers but are more than 20% of frontline workers. Building cleaning services has the biggest share of low-income workers at 39%. Workers at this income level are also overrepresented in grocery stores, convenience, and drug stores (26.7%), along with child care and social services (25.9%).

Workers With No College Degree Are Overrepresented In Four of Six Frontline Industries



Source: Keystone Research Center Analysis figure based on American Community Survey 2018 5-year data published by Center for Economic and Policy Research.

Workers With Incomes of Less Than 200% of the Poverty Level Are Overrepresented in Frontline Industries



Source: Keystone Research Center Analysis figure based on American Community Survey 2018 5-year data published by Center for Economic and Policy Research.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 crisis is reminding all of us how necessary and important this workforce is to the well-being and basic functioning of our communities. However, instead of being praised and lifted-up, many of these workers, disproportionately women and people of color, continue to work for low pay and few protections. Our essential workforce cares for those most sick with COVID-19 and ensures our facilities are clean and germ-free, lessening the spread of the virus. These workers make sure we have access to food, transportation, and the goods we need as we shelter at home. They ensure other essential workers have quality care for their children when they go to work. They are now, and always have been, the foundation to our economy and should be valued, paid, protected, and acknowledged as such.

APPENDIX: Methodology

The data in this analysis is from the Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR) and their national report titled “A Basic Demographic Profile of Workers in Frontline Industries.” The profile uses the most recent estimates of data from the American Community Survey, using a sample that includes data from five years from 2014 to 2018. The demographics of the essential workers is unlikely to have changed in any substantial way in the years since the survey and using a data set that includes five years of ACS data helps ensure that sample sizes are sufficient to produce reasonably precise estimates by industry at the state level.

To define “frontline industries” or “essential workers,” CEPR used the same six industry groupings as the New York City comptroller Scott Stringer did in his recent profile, “New York City’s Frontline Workers.”

The “frontline” or “essential” industry groups, each of which includes one or more specific industries (as classified using the Census Bureau’s Industry Codes), are:

- **Grocery, Convenience, and Drug Stores:** Grocery and related product merchant wholesalers (4470), supermarkets and other grocery stores (4971), convenience stores (4972), pharmacies and drug stores (5070), and general merchandise stores, including warehouse clubs and supercenters (5391).
- **Public Transit:** Rail transportation (6080) and bus service and urban transit (6180)
- **Trucking, Warehouse, and Postal Service:** Truck transportation (6170), warehousing and storage (6390), and postal service (6370).
- **Building Cleaning Services:** Cleaning services to buildings and dwellings (7690).
- **Healthcare:** Offices of physicians (7970), outpatient care centers (8090), home health care services (8170), other health care services (8180), general medical and surgical hospitals, and specialty hospitals (8191), psychiatric and substance abuse hospitals (8192), nursing care facilities (skilled nursing facilities) (8270), and residential care facilities, except skilled nursing facilities (8290).
- **Child Care and Social Services:** Individual and family services (8370), community food and housing, and emergency services (8380), and child day care services (8470).