

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

January 15, 2019

CONTACT:

Lindsey Wallace, Communications Director, lwallace@missoulapartnership.com; 406.541.6461

WAGES UP AND POVERTY DOWN IN MISSOULA COUNTY

Missoula County's average annual wages have increased while the county's poverty rate has decreased relative to Montana's statewide averages, according to data recently compiled by the Montana Department of Revenue. For the first time, the average hourly wage exceeded \$20 per hour, reaching \$20.35.

"This is exactly what we've been working toward in Missoula by increasing the number of high paying jobs that can be filled by people in our community—we know folks expect us to keep creating pathways for people to improve their circumstances until we reach the top of Montana's list for wages and the bottom of the list for poverty," said Grant Kier, Missoula Economic Partnership President and CEO.

In 2016, average wages in Missoula County were 95.1% of Montana's state average. That number has climbed to 97.5% in 2020. Of the seven urban centers in the state, Missoula experienced the second-highest rate of wage growth over the past five years—up 14.5% from 2016, when the average hourly wage in Missoula County was \$17.78.

The Montana Department of Commerce's Big Sky Trust Fund job creation grant program awards grants to companies creating jobs at or above the average hourly wage. In order to access the full grant award, companies in Missoula must pay the equivalent of \$20.35 hourly, which equals an annual full-time wage of \$42,328. Missoula County serves as the applicant and fiscal sponsor of Missoula businesses accessing the program.

"We're encouraged to see these numbers, which demonstrate that programs like the Big Sky Trust Fund job creation grants are moving the needle in the right direction," said Josh Slotnick, Missoula County Commission chair. "We look forward to supporting more businesses that create opportunities for Missoula County residents to prosper."

Missoula Mayor John Engen attributes Missoula's wage growth, in part, to collaborative efforts in the community to encourage high wage job creation. "When we founded the Missoula Economic Partnership a decade ago, we wanted, quite simply, more folks to make a living wage," said Mayor Engen. "So we set about helping businesses with similar goals grow and prosper and we're seeing the results of that intentionality. We don't create good jobs, but we foster an environment where businesspeople who do want to be. And we have much more work to do."