

Job-seekers in Southern Mass. are hit hard by unemployment as hiring deteriorates throughout the state

By **Omar Mohammed** Globe Staff, Updated August 20, 2025, 8:20 a.m.



Kim Chrystie, 54, lost her job last summer and has struggled to find a new position since. JONATHAN WIGGS/GLOBE STAFF

REHOBOTH — Kim Chrystie has been looking for a job for more than a year. Last summer, the 54-year-old marketing executive was laid off from her remote role following a merger at her firm. She has been looking for a new role ever

since, waking up early in her Rehoboth home, grabbing her coffee, and spending four to six hours a day job searching, focusing on roles close to her aging parents, who live just over the Rhode Island line.

Her days are spent scouring LinkedIn and shooting off applications. Her search has become like a full-time job.

“It’s brutal,” she said.

More people in the Commonwealth are looking for work than there are jobs available, analysts say. It’s now [taking job-seekers longer to get hired](#). Employers are skittish about recruiting new workers as [increased tariffs](#), cuts in [research investment](#) from the federal government, [reduced funding for health care](#), and an [uncertain future for emerging sectors](#) such as [offshore wind](#) sour [the economic outlook](#).

“When the nation catches a cold, Massachusetts and the other states, tend to get sick,” said Michael Goodman, a professor of public policy at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. “And within Massachusetts, certain regions of our state, including Southeastern Massachusetts ... tend to get sicker sooner.”

It’s not just people in Southeastern Massachusetts who are struggling to find work. There is evidence [hiring has deteriorated throughout the Commonwealth](#), according to data from the [state’s Labor and Workforce Development office](#).

Goodman said a broader slowdown can be felt more deeply in areas beyond Greater Boston, the engine of the state’s economy.

“A downturn creates even more competition within the Greater Boston region as the people who are having even greater struggles finding work outside commute in search of jobs and make it more competitive,” he said.

In Fall River and New Bedford, two of the largest cities in Southeastern Massachusetts, the job markets are “sluggish,” said Branner Stewart, senior research manager at the

UMass Donahue Institute.

Stewart said data show an increase in people looking for work at a time when net hiring has slowed.

“It’s essentially flat in both cities,” he said. “There could be some people hiring, but the net between losses and new hires is basically close to zero.”

Stephen Colella helped found [Job Club RI](#), which helps people apply for jobs and connects them to partner companies. Attendees come from Southeastern Massachusetts and Rhode Island, and, on average, 20 to 25 people gather at a library in West Warwick, R.I., every Tuesday. He’s noticed it’s taking applicants longer to find new jobs, partly because of a tough market and also because the recruitment process has become too cumbersome.

“It’s a buyer’s market,” Colella said. “The wear and tear that this has, the anxiety and stress that causes the job-seeker, I mean, oftentimes they’ll have two or three rounds of interviews and then they’re ghosted. They don’t hear anything.”

Both Fall River and New Bedford have reported higher jobless rates as of July compared to the same time a year ago, according to data from the [Massachusetts Department of Economic Research](#).

Though down from a little over 8 percent in February, the unemployment rate in Fall River was 6.2 percent in July, up from 5.9 percent a year earlier. In New Bedford, the jobless rate grew to 6.6 percent from 6.2 percent in July of 2024. The data is not seasonally adjusted.

Both cities are outpacing the statewide unemployment rate of 4.8 percent, itself the highest in close to four years. The [national jobless rate](#) was at 4.2 percent last month.

“It’s not surprising if the state’s economy is weakening, you would expect that the outlying areas are probably weakening more or faster or first,” said Alan Clayton-

Matthews, an associate professor emeritus of economics and public policy at Northeastern University.

On Friday, the state's Department of Economic Research chief economist Mark Rembert [said](#) that "there was a gradual slowdown in the labor market" in the state even as July saw fewer workers file for unemployment benefits.

"The data suggests that it is taking longer for those looking for work to land a new position," he said in a statement.

Stewart said Southeastern Massachusetts has proximity to Boston and [Rhode Island](#), which can affect its economic fortunes if those two areas are facing headwinds.

"If Greater Boston and Greater Providence are both experiencing issues, then I think Southeastern Massachusetts potentially can be impacted more negatively," he said.

Unemployment rates in Fall River and New Bedford since 2020

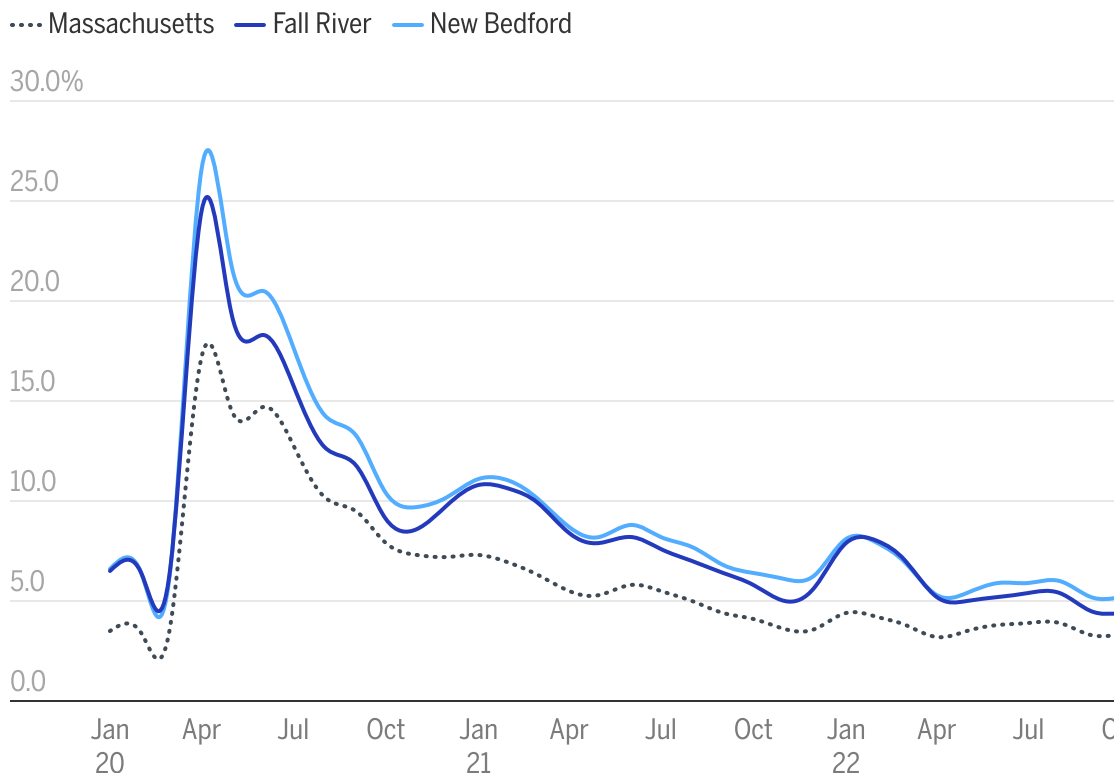


Chart: LILY COWPER FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE • Source: [LAUS](#)

During economic downturns, Southeastern Massachusetts suffers more than the state as a whole and takes longer to recover, said Goodman, who co-edits MassBenchmarks, a journal about the Massachusetts economy.

Part of the reason is the region has a relatively less-educated workforce than the Metro Boston area, the anchor of the region's economy.

While there was no indication of widespread layoffs, signs show the US job market is facing some struggles. The recent national jobs report showed that [employers are slowing down hiring](#).

"There's no question that the labor market has softened considerably," Goodman said. "In an environment where there's fewer jobs than there are workers seeking jobs, employers tend to target those with higher levels of skill because they can."

In previous economic cycles, such as during the dot-com bubble bust in the 2000s and the 2008 financial crisis, Southeastern Massachusetts [took longer to recover from the recessions that followed](#) compared to the state as a whole, Goodman said.

[Southeastern Massachusetts could see its economy hurt](#) as federal funding for emerging sectors in the region, such as offshore wind, decline. Meanwhile, expected cuts to Medicaid and Medicare could also devastate the health care industry, a key employer in the region.

Elsewhere, as research funding dwindles at higher education institutions, that could stymie innovations at the region's universities, which in turn could stifle job creation.

"The South Coast region is exposed, just as the Massachusetts economy is exposed, to these shifts in federal funding priorities," Goodman said. "Our major employers, including schools, colleges and universities, and hospitals and the like, I think, are going to have a challenging period in the next few years if these policies persist."

The outlook is challenging for both older workers and young job-seekers trying to land a job, Goodman said.

Chrystie, the marketing executive who has attended Job Club, has applied to nearly 100 jobs but has received no job offers.

“This is the hardest it’s ever been for me,” she said. “I’m not sure if it’s a combination of my age and seniority or the state of the world right now [which] is pretty chaotic.”

Chrystie is married and has two adult children. She is able to get health benefits through her husband’s work. But the loss of her income has strained her family’s finances.

“Our income is one third of what it was and we still have a mortgage. I’m still paying student loans for my kids’ college, the price of groceries is up, the price of electricity is up,” she said. “If I don’t get a job in the next six months, are we going to have to sell the house? Are we going to have to dip into our 401k? Like, at some point, savings run out.”

The last time she was out of work this long she was 14 years old. She tries to stay optimistic amid rejection notices.

“It used to be a stigma to be laid off, unemployed, but now it’s so common,” she said.

“You kind of just have to put your big girl pants on.”

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