



**Center for  
Employment  
Opportunities**

**Michigan Must End Lifetime Ban on Food Assistance to Formerly Incarcerated Residents**

*Directly impacted Michiganders, CEO, 24 organizations and groups urge Governor Whitmer and legislative leadership to lift its lifetime ban on food assistance for people with drug convictions.*

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**DETROIT, MICHIGAN** -- Yesterday, the [Center for Employment Opportunities](#) and 24 partner organizations sent two letters to Governor Whitmer, Lt. Governor Gilchrist and state legislative leadership to encourage them to [change the state's policy that permanently bars people with two or more felony drug convictions from accessing benefits under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \("SNAP"\) in Michigan](#). We know these rules disproportionately harm Black households, as Black people account for 50% of Michigan's prison population but only 14% of the state's residents<sup>1</sup>.

"We work alongside people every day who struggle to access and maintain food security, so we know that food instability is devastating even during 'normal times,'" said Ashley Blake, Midwestern Regional Director of CEO and Detroit resident. "Denying people food and workforce opportunities is cruel and defies reason. We simply request that Governor Whitmer and state legislative leadership acknowledge the disproportionate impact this crisis is having on currently and formerly incarcerated individuals and ensure that they and their families are able to eat."

We applaud the Governor and the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services for their actions [increasing SNAP benefits and easing eligibility restrictions for 350,000 Michiganders during the COVID-19 response](#). However, SNAP is a critical reentry resource for both food security and access to employment and training. Until Michigan expands food assistance and access to federal SNAP Employment ("E&T") funding to individuals with drug convictions - federal dollars dedicated to workforce programs and community providers to assist returning citizens transition to the workforce, increasing public safety and public health - this policy will perpetuate and likely exacerbate existing inequities.

SNAP works to improve food security and economic mobility.<sup>2</sup> On average, it kept 273,000 Michiganders out of poverty annually between 2013 and 2016. Additionally, \$1 in SNAP benefits can generate almost \$2 of economic activity, fueling job creation and promoting stable communities through shared access to basic necessities. Federal policy bans individuals with felony drug convictions from SNAP, but allows states to opt-out of the ban. About half of the states have fully opted out, allowing full access to those with multiple drug convictions, while the remaining half generally have less restrictive policies than Michigan.

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<sup>1</sup> Sakala, Leah. "Overrepresentation of Blacks in Michigan." Overrepresentation of Blacks in Michigan | Prison Policy Initiative, Prison Policy Initiative, May 2014, [www.prisonpolicy.org/graphs/2010percent/MI\\_Blacks\\_2010.html](http://www.prisonpolicy.org/graphs/2010percent/MI_Blacks_2010.html)

<sup>2</sup> Nchako, Catlin, and Lexin Cai. "A Closer Look at Who Benefits from SNAP: State-by-State Fact Sheets." Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 16 Mar. 2020, [www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/a-closer-look-at-who-benefits-from-snap-state-by-state-fact-sheets](http://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/a-closer-look-at-who-benefits-from-snap-state-by-state-fact-sheets)

COVID-19 is revealing the gaping hole that centuries of sustained systems of oppression and discrimination can wreak on large segments of our society. “Everyone needs food. Especially if you’re trying to get back on your feet after prison in a pandemic,” said Derrick Clarke, a single father of two young children, and CEO participant who returned home after spending three years in a Michigan prison in July 2019.

Now, more than ever, we need Michigan to take emergency action rooted in equitable solutions and solidarity to build better infrastructures so that all people have access to the support they deserve.

Read both full letters to the Governor and legislative leadership [here](#) and [here](#).

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