

June 13, 2019 (updated May 2020)

Governor Gretchen Whitmer
Lt. Governor Garlin Gilchrist II
PO Box 30013
Lansing, MI 48909

Senator Peter MacGregor
cc: Senator Jim Stamas, Senator Curtis Hertel
Michigan Senate
PO Box 30036
Lansing, MI 48909

Representative Mary Whiteford
cc: Representative Shane Hernandez, Representative Abdullah Hammoud
Michigan House of Representatives
PO Box 30014
Lansing, MI 4890

Dear Governor Whitmer, Lt. Governor Gilchrist, Senator MacGregor and Representative Whiteford,

The COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced the importance of providing critical benefits to the most vulnerable Michiganders. Food security is one of the most crucial resources at this time, but so is the Employment & Training program component of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), as many individuals have lost - and will lose - their jobs due to COVID-19. Despite the importance of this program, the administration of the SNAP E&T program has made it difficult for individuals and families to access this resource, and for service providers to fully leverage this funding effectively in order to continually serve people during this crisis.

To strengthen the state's workforce, we urge you to lift state's eligibility restrictions for the **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program ("SNAP") currently applied to Michiganders with criminal convictions**. This policy is noted in Department of Health and Human Services ("DHHS") [BEM 203, Criminal Justice Disqualifications](#), and its statutory basis is reauthorized each year in the budget. This policy prevents individuals with criminal convictions from accessing necessary food assistance and federal SNAP Employment and Training ("E&T") funding - workforce funds which help transition those citizens to stable, working members of the community.

Specifically, Michigan prohibits SNAP enrollment for people with felony drug convictions and people who are in violation of probation or parole supervision. The statutory base for the policy is in the DHHS budget boilerplate of the state appropriations bill (e.g. [see p. 192 line 17 of this year's draft appropriations bill](#)). This blanket SNAP prohibition includes **people who violate conditions of their parole or probation** (only for the time period they are determined to be violating supervision, it is not a permanent ban). Common violations may include missing an appointment with their

parole officer or failing a drug test. By prohibiting these individuals from accessing food security and SNAP E&T, the state is actually reducing its ability to utilize resources that move individuals closer to financial stability and away from the behavior associated with violations.

Additionally, the state **permanently bans individuals with two or more felony drug convictions** (stemming from separate incidents) from accessing SNAP benefits. While federal law prohibits people with felony drug convictions from receiving SNAP, it deliberately gives states the discretion to waive that prohibition and allow individuals with felony drug convictions to be eligible for SNAP. Most states waive that ban in its entirety to aid the successful reentry of individuals convicted of drug offenses. In fact, in the last two years, Louisiana and Mississippi, two of the three states that incarcerate at the highest rate in the country, lifted this ban as part of an evidence-based, comprehensive effort to reduce recidivism and enhance public safety.

In particular, the ban for people with two or more felony drug convictions impacts Michiganders' ability to access SNAP and achieve employment for their entire lives. Based on 2016 MDOC data, 28% of all annual felony criminal court dispositions in Michigan were drug offense convictions, indicating this policy change could impact a large portion of justice-involved Michiganders.

This policy also has ramifications for the state's **ability to draw down federal funding through the SNAP Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) program**. The state's SNAP E&T program allows job training and employment service providers to use federal funding to reimburse for 50 percent of all state, local and private funding spent on job training services for SNAP participants. In other words, for individuals who are eligible for SNAP, the SNAP E&T funding could help them ***access additional employment and training services at no cost to the state.***

It is particularly critical that the state should waive this restriction in light of COVID-19's continued spread throughout Michigan jails and prisons; the state should anticipate more people will be coming home and should be prepared to support them when they do. Lifting eligibility restrictions for SNAP is an opportunity to make transparent data-driven, equity-informed decisions around COVID-19 that centers the needs of those who are most hard hit by this pandemic: impoverished communities of color that are overrepresented in the criminal system.

To support individuals coming home to communities deeply impacted by COVID-19, successfully reconnect them to Michigan's workforce, and reduce their likelihood of returning to jail and prison, **we encourage you to strike the boilerplate language and from this year's budget and waive the federal restrictions preventing those with felony drug convictions and those with probation and parole violations from accessing SNAP**. Allowing more people with criminal convictions to receive food assistance and access job training programs helps the state add more individuals to their workforce and reduce recidivism. We strongly support the goal of helping SNAP participants obtain and keep quality jobs that enable them to achieve economic security.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

[Center for Employment Opportunities](#)

[Safe and Just Michigan](#)

[Michigan League for Public Policy](#)

[Detroit Justice Center](#)

[Michigan Liberation](#)

[JustLeadershipUSA](#)

[Nation Outside](#)

[Michigan Council on Crime and Delinquency](#)

[Michigan CURE](#)

[National Association of Social Workers Michigan Chapter](#)

[American Friends Service Committee Michigan Criminal Justice Program](#)

[Saginaw County Chamber of Commerce](#)

[Talent2025](#)

[Recovery Park](#)

[United Way for Southeastern Michigan](#)

[Detroit Food Policy Council](#)

[Michigan Poverty Law Program](#)

[Law Enforcement Action Partnership](#)

[Detroit Disability Power](#)

[Warriors on Wheels of Metropolitan Detroit](#)

[Huron Valley DSA](#)

[Street Democracy](#)

[Birth Safe](#)

[Friends of Restorative Justice of Washtenaw County](#)