



November 30, 2020

Dear members of the House Families, Children, and Seniors committee,

On behalf of the Center for Employment Opportunities, we are writing in support of Senate Bill 1006 and urging you to pass this bill. CEO provides immediate, comprehensive employment services to individuals with criminal convictions in Michigan and is a member of the Hungry for Justice coalition, a broad and diverse statewide coalition of criminal justice reform organizations, disability advocates, and others who have joined in solidarity to ensure equal access to food for all who call Michigan home.

This bill comes as a relief at a critical time of food insecurity for thousands of Michiganders with felony drug convictions in their history. 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. The effects of the pandemic have proven greatest for Black Michiganders, reinforcing racial disparities in the state that are already prevalent in the criminal justice system.

Despite the importance of the SNAP program, the state has made it difficult for vulnerable individuals and families to access this resource, and for service providers to leverage this funding effectively in order to continually serve people during this crisis. CEO has experienced this firsthand in Detroit, as we provide immediate employment to individuals coming home from incarceration and help our participants enroll in SNAP so that they can access employment and training resources through the SNAP E&T program.

Prior to the passage of this year's budget, Michigan law prevented individuals with multiple felony drug convictions in their history from accessing SNAP. To make this change permanent in statute, **we urge you to pass Senate Bill 1006**. While federal law prohibits people with multiple felony drug convictions from receiving SNAP, federal law deliberately gives states the discretion to waive that prohibition and allow individuals with felony drug convictions to be eligible for SNAP. This legislation would waive that ban in its entirety, as many other states have done. In fact, in the last few 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.

This legislation, along with the successful efforts to waive this requirement through the MDHHS budget, would strengthen the state's workforce and provide critical relief to Michiganders



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suffering from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. 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,

Ashley Blake
Midwest Regional Director
Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO)

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