



December 2, 2020

Dear Members of the House Families, Children and Seniors Committee:

Hungry For Justice is a statewide coalition made up of organizations and individuals working together to promote policies to ensure equal access to food across Michigan. We submit this writing in support of Senate Bill 1006 which, if enacted, will be a critical part of ending the practice of permanently banning access to all food assistance benefits in Michigan for individuals with two or more drug felony convictions. Conviction history should never lead to the denial of basic rights and human dignity.

Food justice is a racial justice and criminal justice issue. As the novel coronavirus took hold of the nation, food insecurity more than tripled in US households with children. Racial disparities in infection rates, deaths, loss of employment and stable housing in Michigan are staggering and even more devastating for individuals with a criminal conviction. SB 1006 is an opportunity for the legislature to craft policies that address the inequities driving these statistics. Passing SB 1006 is essential to building a stronger, more resilient and equitable Michigan.

Black people are disproportionately food insecure and COVID-19 has only exacerbated this: **41% of Black households are currently food insecure compared to 23% overall.** Black Michiganders are 14% of the state's racial demographic but account for over 30% of the state's COVID-19 related deaths. In addition, Black people make up only 14% of Michigan's residents but account for 50% of the statewide prison population. The reforms in this bill will substantially increase access to affordable food options for these individuals and their families.

SB 1006 is a critical part of our efforts to make essential reforms to SNAP at a critical moment in our country, and Michigan specifically by lowering barriers to individuals with convictions to access an inclusive food system. Structural racism in both the criminal legal and food systems, in particular, has plagued too many Michiganders, putting Black and brown families, people who have been in the legal system and other marginalized groups at increased risk of poverty, incarceration and their concomitant health challenges.

From 2011 until the passage of this year's budget Michigan law permanently denied access to SNAP benefits for anyone in the state with two or more drug felony convictions. **We strongly urge you to pass SB 1006 and protect this change by codifying it into Michigan statute.** through opting out of enforcing this provision of federal law as the majority of states, most recently Louisiana and Mississippi, have done.

Passing SB 1006 is also a step towards realizing the state's ongoing, continued commitment to "keep Michigan healthy," by strengthening access to food, recognizing food a human right and in so doing, strengthening Michigan by supporting access to essential food supports that help all of Michigan's residents live full, healthy and productive lives.

Thank you for your consideration.