

Michigan League for Public Policy

2019 BUDGET PRIORITIES

Prevent Hunger by Continuing the “Heat and Eat” Policy

— LEAGUE RECOMMENDATION —

Continue the current “heat and eat” policy to ensure adequate nutrition for Michigan families, children, people with disabilities and seniors.

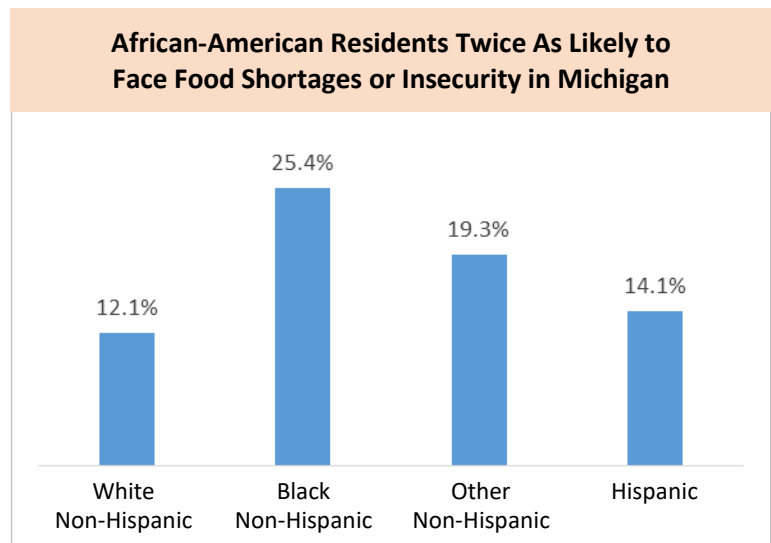
BACKGROUND: Between 2010 and 2014, Michigan participated in the federal “heat and eat” policy that allowed the state to maximize food assistance payments by providing \$1 in federal energy assistance funding to households receiving Food Assistance Program (FAP) benefits—funding that allowed them to claim additional federal food assistance. In 2014, federal law changed to require families to receive more than \$20 in energy assistance to be eligible for additional FAP benefits.

With that change in federal law, Michigan began to phase out the “heat and eat” policy, reducing more than \$75 per month in food benefits for approximately 340,000 Michigan residents. Recognizing the impact on Michiganders, the Legislature restored the “heat and eat” policy in both the 2017 and 2018 state budgets.

- **Many Michiganders need food assistance to avoid hunger.** In the 2017 budget year, 1.4 million Michigan residents used food assistance to ensure basic nutrition, including approximately 1 in 4 of the state’s children. Food assistance benefits respond well to economic downturns by providing a needed safety net.
- **Food assistance benefits are low and are often not enough to get a family through a month.** In 2017, the average monthly food benefit was \$121 per person, or roughly \$1.35 per meal.

WHY IT MATTERS:

- **Many children receiving food assistance live in deep poverty.** In 2015, 26% of the state’s children received FAP benefits. More than one-third of those children lived in families with incomes under 51% of poverty, while another 41% lived in households with incomes between 51% and 100% of the poverty line.
- **African-American and Latinx families are more likely to face food shortages.** Approximately 14% of Michiganders live in households that do not have consistent, secure supplies of food. African-American residents, who are much more likely to live in high-poverty neighborhoods with few sources of healthy foods, are twice as likely to face food shortages.
- **The impact of inadequate nutrition in childhood can be long-lasting.** Children whose mothers lacked adequate nutrition during pregnancy and preconception are more likely to be born underweight and face related health challenges. Further, without



access to healthy foods, children can struggle in school and fall behind their peers. And, adults who had access to federally funded food assistance through age 5 are less likely to have stunted growth (down 6%) and heart disease (down 5%), substantially less likely to be obese (down 16%), and more likely to have completed high school (up 18%).

