

September 23, 2011

Dear Governor Snyder,

We urge you to suspend the implementation of an asset test for the Food Assistance Program (FAP). Food is the most basic of needs, and in a time with high unemployment and limited job opportunities, many Michiganders are experiencing hunger and struggling to feed their families. As a result of falling incomes, food assistance cases have increased 50% to almost 2 million since fall 2008 and one in every seven Michiganders is food insecure.

Asset development is one of the surest paths out of poverty and any policy that discourages a person from achieving self-sufficiency is counterproductive and will result in families needing government assistance for longer. Many of those receiving food assistance are the recently unemployed who have never had to avail themselves of government assistance before. These households are more likely to have newer cars, houses that they cannot sell but can no longer afford to live in, and modest savings that they have put away for years. An asset test forces people to choose between selling a car and feeding their families. Recognizing the important role assets play in ending poverty, 30 states do not even apply an asset test for food assistance.

Food assistance benefits not only help families, but also drive economic growth in the retail, agricultural and food production industries. For every \$1 of food assistance money spent, \$1.79 of economic activity is generated in the state. This policy has the potential to cause Michigan to lose hundreds of millions of dollars in federal food stamp allocations and will actually cost the state money to implement. While the food assistance benefit is fully federally funded, Michigan does pay for 50 percent of the administrative costs of the program. This will increase the caseload of DHS workers tenfold and place an unfathomable burden on DHS caseworkers who already are assigned more than 900 cases each.

Asset testing vehicles is also unwise and discourages household members from working and can impact school attendance. Forty-eight states and DC exempt at least one vehicle entirely and 33 of these states do not count vehicles as assets at all. Vehicle asset tests force people to drive vehicles of lower value, vehicles that are more likely to break down and have higher maintenance costs and that are less safe, potentially impacting public safety.

If the state truly wishes to help families become self-sufficient and get off of government assistance, then the state should encourage, and not punish, asset building. We urge you to prevent a harmful asset test from being implemented so that families in need can re-establish themselves more quickly and rely on government assistance for a shorter time. Now is not the time to limit access to food for Michigan families.

Cc: Director Corrigan, Dennis Muchmore, Bill Rustem, Brian Rooney

AARP Michigan
ACCESS
Access of West Michigan
Action of Greater Lansing
Associated Charities of Lenawee County
Baraga-Houghton-Keweenaw Community Action Agency, Inc.
Blessed Pantry Inc.
Caregivers Ministry Network
Center for Civil Justice
Charitable Union
Child Care Network
Christ Community Development Corp.
Christ's Kingdom Ministries
Community Action Agency-Jackson, Lenawee & Hillsdale counties
Community Action Agency of St. Clair County
Community Action, Battle Creek
Community Economic Development Association of Michigan
Community Health and Social Services Center
Covenant Senior Day Program
Crystal Lake Community Church
Daily Bread of Lenawee
Dickinson-Iron Community Services Agency
Divine Impressions
Detroit Public Schools, Homeless Unit
Detroit Rescue Mission Ministries
Development Centers, Inc.
Disability Advocates of Kent County
Ezekiel Project, Saginaw
Family Counseling and Children's Services of Lenawee County
Family Service, Inc.
Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank
First Congregational United Church of Christ, Rev. Siragusa
First Wes Food Pantry
Fishes & Loaves Food Pantry
Focus: HOPE
Food Bank Council of Michigan
Food Bank of Eastern Michigan
Food Bank of South Central Michigan
Forgotten Harvest
Freedom House
Friendship House
Gamaliel of Michigan, Sister Cheryl Liske
Gleaners Community Food Bank
Goodwill Industries of Greater Detroit
Grant Wesleyan Church
Greater Glory MB Church, Rev. Chandler
Greater St. Matthew Baptist Church
Green Gables Haven

Habitat for Humanity of Lenawee County
Heritage Homes, Inc.
Hesperia United Methodist Church
Highland Park NAACP
Holton Community Center
Homeless Action Network of Detroit
Independent Living Housing, Inc.
International Detroit Black Expo, Inc.
Jackson Friendly Home
Jehovah Jireh Ministries of West Michigan
Kalamazoo Alliance for Equality
Kalamazoo Loaves and Fishes
Labor Council for Latin American Advancement
Latin Americans for Social and Economic Development
Lenawee Community Foundation
Lenawee Emergency and Affordable Housing Corp.
Little Friends Child Care
Madison Square Church
Mendon Emergency Care Network Food Cupboard
Menominee Delta Schoolcraft Community Action Agency
Michigan Center Community Food Pantry
Michigan Community Action Agency Association
Michigan Council on Crime and Delinquency
Michigan County Social Services Association
Michigan Developmental Disabilities Council
Michigan Education Association
Michigan EITC Coalition
Michigan League for Human Services
Michigan Legal Services
Michigan Nonprofit Association
Michigan's Children
Michigan Society of Gerontology
Mid Michigan Community Action
Ministries Bread of Life Food Pantry
Mothering Justice
New Community Fourth Reformed Church Mobile Food Pantry
New Detroit, Inc.
Nonprofit Finance Fund
North End Neighborhood Patrol
North Ottawa County Council on Aging
Peace Lutheran Church, Pastor Bryan Schneider-Thomas
PHI-Michigan
Progress Michigan
Project Starburst
Rainbow PUSH Detroit
Rainbow PUSH Michigan
Representative Rashida Tlaib
Restaurant Opportunities Center

Sacred Suds

Saginaw County Community Action Committee, Inc.

Salem Housing Community Development Corporation

Share Blessings Church of God Pentecostal Food Pantry

Simon House

South County Community Services

St. Anthony's Family Center

St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church, Thomas Botham

St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry

Sugar Law Center for Economic and Social Justice

Sylvester Hyman and Associates, LLC

Taking Others Under Caring Hands Every Day

The Manna Food Project

Volunteers of America, MI

Wayne County Chapter, National Organization for Women

Wesley Park United Methodist Church

Women Influencing Nations Network

Yad Ezra

Zion Lutheran Church, Rev. Julie Schneider-Thomas