Michigan low-income college students enrolled in career and technical education programs can apply for food assistance; Benefits available to Perkins program enrollees for first time

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LANSING, Mich. – Michigan students in college Career and Technical Education programs returning to classes this fall are now eligible to receive food assistance if they meet other eligibility requirements.

The Michigan departments of Labor and Economic Opportunity (LEO) and Health and Human Services (MDHHS) are encouraging students to apply for food assistance benefits online at Michigan.gov/MIBridges.

LEO and MDHHS sought and received federal approval for the new initiative – effective May 2020 – to address rising food insecurity among students that has been made worse by COVID-19.

Close to 16,000 low-income college students in Michigan who are enrolled in Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs are eligible to receive food assistance benefits through the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

“As Michigan CTE students are preparing for high-demand, critical job openings, they shouldn’t have to worry about how they’ll get their next meal,” said LEO Director Jeff Donofrio. “These SNAP benefits will help them focus on their educational needs and prepare for a successful future.”

Previously, college students enrolled in qualifying CTE programs who attended school at least half-time could not qualify for SNAP benefits, even if they met income eligibility requirements, unless they fell into certain categories such as working at least 20 hours per week, caring for a child, or being unable to work.

“MDHHS was already working to help more people put nutritious food on the table prior to the pandemic,” said MDHHS Director Robert Gordon. “COVID-19 made this priority even more critical. Due to the pandemic, many students lost their jobs. As a result, they lost their SNAP eligibility through no fault of their own.”

College students in Michigan are now eligible for SNAP if they meet income and other program requirements and are enrolled at least half-time in an occupational program that leads to employment under the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the Twenty-First Century Act of 2018 known as Perkins V.

“Expanding access to SNAP is a huge benefit to students who are juggling their courses along with work, family and other obligations,” said Mike Hansen, president of the Michigan Community College Association. “We’re grateful that MDHHS expanded access and is making it so much easier to apply for benefits on MI Bridges.”

The Perkins Postsecondary Career and Technical Education Program provides funding to 28 community colleges, three public universities and one tribal college to support pathways to high-wage, high-skilled and in-demand careers that require less than a bachelor’s degree.

Those institutions offer more than 3,600 qualifying programs, offering a certificate or associates degree to careers in fields such as information technology, health care, hospitality and manufacturing. There are nearly 90,000 students enrolled in these programs in Michigan. Some of those students may already be receiving food assistance benefits, while others will become eligible for this new opportunity.

For anyone currently enrolled in a Perkins program with an existing food assistance case who has experienced a loss of income, their MDHHS caseworker will determine Perkins program status to ensure the benefits are correct.

Any Perkins student who wants to apply for food assistance should provide documentation from their school that outlines their major and program or course of study to assist in determining their eligibility for SNAP. Examples could include a proof of registration and a document showing their major, program, or course of study. A caseworker will use that information to determine eligibility.

Students interested in applying for food assistance can go to Michigan.gov/MIBridges. Verification of enrollment in a Perkins program must be provided by the student or may be requested from the postsecondary institution.

Learn more about the Perkins Postsecondary CTE Program at Michigan.gov/LEO-Perkins.

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