Gov. Whitmer launches new, first in nation Futures for Frontliners program to offer essential, frontline workers a tuition-free path to community college

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Education, labor, business, and workforce leaders join to urge Michigan's 625,000 COVID-19 essential workers to apply now for tuition-free college

LANSING – Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, along with leaders in education, business, labor and workforce development, today launched the nation's first program offering tuition-free college to an estimated 625,000 Michiganders who provided essential, frontline services during COVID-19 Stay Home, Stay Safe orders between April – June 2020.

Futures for Frontliners, inspired by the GI Bill which provided college degree to those serving their country in WWII, offers Michigan adults without college degrees or high school diplomas who provided essential services during the pandemic a tuition-free pathway to gaining the skills needed to obtain high-demand, high-wage careers. The funding is not only available to those in the medical field, but also essential workers in manufacturing, nursing homes, grocery stores, sanitation, delivery, retail and more.

"This initiative is Michigan's way of expressing gratitude to essential workers for protecting public health and keeping our state running," Whitmer said. "Whether it was stocking shelves, delivering supplies, picking up trash, manufacturing PPE or providing medical care, you were there for us. Now this is your chance to pursue the degree or training you've been dreaming about to help you and your own family succeed."

To be eligible for the program, applicants must:

- Be a Michigan resident
- Have worked in an essential industry at least part-time for 11 of the 13 weeks between April 1 – June 30, 2020
- Have been required by their job to work outside the home at least some of the time between April 1 – June 30, 2020
- Not have previously earned an associate or bachelor's degree
- Not be in default on a Federal student loan
- Complete a Futures for Frontliners scholarship application by 11:59 p.m., Dec. 31, 2020

Frontline workers are encouraged to visit **www.michigan.gov/Frontliners** to explore career opportunities, a list of local community colleges and get started on their application – even if they don't already have a high school diploma.

The program is a $24M investment funded by Governor's Education Emergency Relief (GEER) Fund – part of the CARES Act, and supports **the state's Sixty by 30 goal** announced at the Governor's first state of the state address to increase the number of working-age Michiganders completing an a industry certificate, college degree or apprenticeship. A more educated workforce is essential to help businesses grow, make Michigan a more competitive state to attract jobs of the future and help families navigate a changing economy and increase income.

"The vast majority of good paying jobs continue to require at least some education beyond high school," said Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity Director Jeff Donofrio. "Futures for Frontliners gives those who helped save lives and kept our communities operating during the height of COVID an opportunity to increase their skills and income and helps us close the state's skills gap. For Michigan's economy to recover and grow, its critical we continue to provide expanded opportunities to all."

Advocates for additional career training say Futures for Frontliners also helps them off-set training costs and provide another avenue for retention and long-term career growth.

"Michigan manufacturers have been on the front lines in defense against the COVID-19 threat, creating essential products necessary for daily life; from food and pharmaceuticals, to transportation and even toilet paper," said John Walsh, President and CEO of the Michigan Manufacturers Association. "The Futures for Frontliners program will recognize these truly-deserving heroes, investing in their personal future as well as the economic future of our state."

"As an employer of nearly 20,000 frontline associates here in Michigan and beyond, we are proud and thankful for each of our employees who stepped up to feed our customers and our communities during the pandemic," Rachel Hurst Corporate Affairs Manager for the Kroger Co. of Michigan said. "We're excited for them to have this hard-earned opportunity to continue their education with support from the Futures for Frontliners program which pairs well with our Feed Your Future program."

"With short staffing a challenge for our workers across many medical professions, this program helps create a pipeline of talent for our growing healthcare workforce," said Andrea Acevedo, President of SEIU Healthcare. Michigan Whether you are a hospital or nursing home worker,

you can take advantage of this opportunity in nearly every workplace. I'm so excited for our union workers who now have the opportunity to add new skills that will help them advance in their careers."

"Henry Ford College, and I personally, are proud to support the Futures for Frontliners program, and to partner with the State of Michigan and other public and private partners to help frontline workers create a better future," said Russ Kavalhuna, Henry Ford College President. "We believe this program represents a unique, first-of-its-kind opportunity for people who have earned a College education. They put themselves at risk to serve Michigan residents during a pandemic. We will put their futures at the forefront now."

Several other business organizations, corporations, unions and legislators have volunteered to serve as Frontliners Champions with a commitment to inform their frontline workers, members and constituents about this tuition-free college opportunity.

Futures for Frontliners Champions

Business Groups:

- Business Leaders for Michigan
- Community Bankers of Michigan
- Detroit Chamber of Commerce
- Detroit Fire Fighters Association
- Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce
- Health Care Association of Michigan
- MichBusiness
- Michigan Association for Female Entrepreneurs
- Michigan Association of Ambulance Services
- Michigan Association of Chiefs of Police
- Michigan Association of Counties
- Michigan Association of Fire Chiefs
- Michigan Association of Fire Fighters
- Michigan Bankers Association
- Michigan Chamber of Commerce
- Michigan Community College Association
- Michigan Credit Union League
- Michigan Health and Hospital Association
- Michigan HomeCare & Hospice Association
- Michigan Manufacturers Association
- Michigan Nonprofit Association
- Michigan Oil and Gas Association
- Michigan Petroleum Association & Michigan Association of Convenience Stores
- Michigan Pharmacists Association
- Michigan Public Transit Association
- Michigan Restaurant & Lodging Association

- Michigan Retailers Associations
- Michigan Sheriffs Association
- Michigan Soft Drink Association
- Michigan State Firemen's Association
- Michigan Works! Agencies
- Midwest Independent Retailers Association
- Small Business Association of Michigan
- Telecommunications Association of Michigan
- United Dairy Industry of Michigan

Corporations:

- Consumers Energy
- DTE
- Home Depot
- Kroger
- Lowes
- Meijer
- Target
- Walmart

Unions (affiliated with AFL-CIO):

- Amalgamated Transit Union
- American Federation of Government Employees
- American Federation of Labor & Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO)
- American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees
- American Federation of Teachers
- Communication Workers of America
- International Association of Fire Fighters
- International Union of Painters and Allied Trades
- Laborers' International Union of North America
- Operating Engineers 324
- Unite Here
- United Auto Workers
- United Steelworkers
- Utility Workers Union of America

Unions:

- Michigan Education Association
- Michigan Nurses Association
- Michigan Regional Council of Union Carpenters and Millwrights
- Service Employees International Union Michigan State Council
- Teamsters Joint Council #43
- United Food and Commercial Workers 876

- United Food and Commercial Workers 951

Legislators

- Jim Ananich
- Rosemary Bayer
- Stephanie Chang
- Curtis Hertel, Jr.
- Adam Hollier
- Jeff Irwin
- Sean McCann
- Mallory McMorrow
- Winnie Brinks
- Dayna Polehanki
- Jeremy Moss
- Sylvia Santana
- Laurie Pohutsky
- Mari Manoogian
- Terry J. Sabo
- Jim Ellison
- Padma Kuppa
- Abdullah Hammoud
- Alex Garza
- Donna Lasinski
- Kristy Pagan
- Tyrone Carter
- Kara Hope
- Robert Wittenberg
- Rachel Hood
- Brenda Carter
- Jim Haadsma
- Cynthia A Johnson
- Yousef Rabhi
- Matt Koleszar
- Leslie Love
- Angela Witwer
- Lori Stone
- John G. Chirkun
- Rebekah Warren
- Cara Clemente
- Sheryl Kennedy
- Sarah Anthony

For the latest information on the COVID-19 outbreak, visit **Michigan.gov/Coronavirus** and **CDC.gov/Coronavirus**.

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