MDHHS and LEO partner to help low-income college students enrolled in career and technical education programs to receive food assistance

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 5, 2020

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LANSING, Mich. – Close to 90,000 low-income college students in Michigan who are enrolled in career or technical education programs are eligible to receive food assistance benefits through a new State of Michigan initiative effective this week.

The Michigan departments of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) and Labor and Economic Opportunity (LEO) announced the change to combat rising food insecurity among students, exacerbated by COVID-19.

“Hunger was a problem for students before COVID-19, and it is a far greater challenge today,” said MDHHS Director Robert Gordon. “Because of this policy change, thousands of students will no longer need to choose between dropping out of school and getting critical food aid. The change will help Michigan students put food on the table in today’s crisis, it will help Michigan be more competitive economically as the economy recovers.”

Until now, college students enrolled in qualifying Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs who attended school at least half-time could not qualify for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), 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. Due to COVID-19, many students have lost their jobs, and as a result, they have lost their SNAP eligibility through no fault of their own.

With the change this week, college students will be 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.

Currently, the Perkins Postsecondary CTE 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 88,458 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.

“Supporting CTE students, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, not only helps them upskill for in-demand jobs, it also helps Michigan employers fill critical job openings that support our economic future,” said LEO Director Jeff Donofrio.

In order to qualify, students must meet all requirements of the Food Assistance Program, which Michigan administers to distribute federal SNAP benefits.

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 www.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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