

UCOM COMMUNICATOR

Spring 2023



Now more than ever,
your neighbors need you.

What Now?

by: Dr. Bruce Roller

SNAP Benefits Cut in Michigan

What can you do to help?

"We're slashing your food budget by \$100 a month...what will you give up?"

This was the message passed down from on high beginning March 1 for people in our state of Michigan.

Her expression is grim as Brenda explains her family's food catastrophe as "standing on the edge of a cliff, with a bulldozer bearing down on us." While millions of people in Michigan lost an average of \$95 a month in SNAP benefits, Brenda's family of four saw theirs reduced from nearly \$400 a month to just \$85 . Can you imagine that kind of cut in your food budget? It is especially bad timing for such a cut since grocery prices rose considerably in 2022 and still more in the first quarter of 2023.

"Emergency allotments and other forms of COVID-19 relief implemented to respond to the pandemic really **were just bringing the benefits up to where they should have been for a long time,**" said Julie Cassidy, a senior policy analyst at the Michigan League for Public Policy.



"It's distressing to see back sliding on this. Now is not the time to go back. **We've seen these allotments are critical for families.**"

Where are families turning with these catastrophic cuts from their food budget? Hundreds of people in Grand Rapids, Wyoming, and Grandville are looking to UCOM. Scores of people who have not needed our emergency food services for years are coming to us with frightening stories of loss and need. This challenge is not unique to UCOM. Nonprofit organizations nationwide are bracing for a tsunami of need created in part by bias and racism. (Racial disparities in housing, food access, and health care, among other basic needs, are legion in the USA and around the world.)

Racism

Black and Hispanic people have been more than twice as likely to experience poverty as their white counterparts in each of the past 10 years according to the census information released in 2021.



While women are generally paid less than men, Black and Hispanic women are [disproportionately represented](#) in jobs that offer low wages and insufficient workplace protections and benefits. They also experience lower wages than men employed in the same occupations. [A lack of work-family policies](#) to support work and care giving—such as national paid family and medical leave and affordable child care—also fuel these stark disparities.

Like many of our neighbors, Brenda works for less than \$9 an hour, not enough to pay for childcare for her two preschoolers. If her 70-year-old mother-in-law were unwilling to watch the children for free, Brenda would lose money if she worked.

Food-service workers are, if anything, paid worse than Brenda. Louisa waits tables for \$2.80 an hour. Her take-home pay relies on supplemental voluntary tipping which is itself a remnant of slavery.

What can you do?

These egregious abuses are heaped one after another on our neighbors creating unconscionable oppression. The problem of systemic racism and generational poverty seems too big to tackle. It's not.

At UCOM we are committed to inviting you to attack this dreadful system in two practical ways. The first is advocating, activating, and agitating for policy changes that lift people out of poverty. This includes making SNAP benefits equal to or greater than they were when COVID-19 was considered pandemic. It means raising the national and state minimum wage to \$15 an hour as a starting point. It may



mean promoting collective bargaining unions, universal health care, and other egalitarian measures that “promote the general welfare”.

While you are doing whatever you can to encourage equity, be the safety-net.

Give as generously and as consistently as you can to ensure that food insecurity is eradicated worldwide, beginning at home in one of the wealthiest nations in the world.

Give money and volunteer time to organizations that are using this two-fold approach to justice and abundance for all people. Enlist your family, friends, and anyone who will listen to join you in defeating poverty and all the -isms that injustice generates. Spread the wealth by giving to mutual aid networks, initiatives to benefit the unhoused, and churches that are fulfilling their responsibility by ministering to people's needs while preserving respect and dignity.

While you are working for policy changes to bring liberty and justice to your neighbors, don't forget that many people need help now. Until we can achieve eradication of poverty together, you can be part of providing a respite for its worst effects.

WALK FOR GOOD FOOD

Kick off May 7

An in-person kick-off event at Mulick Park will include t-shirt pick up, light refreshments, walking route, and children's activities.

MAY 7 – MAY 17:
Walk in your neighborhood

You can support UCOM by joining our team and walking with us, donating to our team, or donating to an individual team member!

Help us build good food systems in our community that are fair, green, healthy, and affordable.



Walk with us!



YOU CAN HELP!

1. Join our Community Champions by making a recurring gift!

2. Donate personal care items. Contact Shawn for a list of the most needed items.

3. Donate can openers for our unhoused neighbors.

4. Join team UCOM as a part of the Walk for Good Food! Donate, Walk, or volunteer!

5. Volunteer! UCOM needs shoppers to purchase produce for the pantry using Meijer Simply Give cards.

UCOM

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