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Press Release - For Immediate Release

Six Area Students to Visit the Nation's Capital

November 15, 2011, Berrien, Cass, VanBuren Counties, Michigan—A delegation of students enrolled in Michigan Works' Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG) classes will attend the JAG National Student Leadership Conference November 16th-20th in Washington DC. The students will join 600 other JAG students from across the country in activities to include: a luncheon with high level political leaders, networking, skill building activities, and leadership development. The students will also learn firsthand about American democracy as they explore Washington DC's monuments, historical sites, and museums.

Michigan Works executive director, Todd Gustafson, says that while this is a great opportunity for students, the communities in which they live will also benefit. "Our goal is to meet the needs of employers today and in the future. We know businesses in our communities will need leaders down the road. We're helping these young people develop into professional, dependable, employees who will be able to solve the problems businesses encounter as we move further into the 21st century."

Niles sophomore Paul Norman, says he expects to do some presentations on the trip and to talk a lot with his peers about leadership and how to become a better leader. Benton Harbor junior Omari Kohn says, "I expect to gain more knowledge of how to perform and act on a professional level." He adds that he believes this experience will help him reach his career goals.

The six were selected by their teachers out of a total of 180 area students currently enrolled in JAG in local high schools. Le'Darren Thompson, who attends the Michigan Works! Bridge Academy, knows it is pretty special to have been chosen, "I feel really blessed about being selected to go to Washington DC. There are a lot of people who could have gone. I feel really good because I worked really hard to get to this point." Kohn feels the same way, "I have a feeling of accomplishment, responsibility, and excitement. I'm proud knowing I was chosen to represent the JAG class of Benton Harbor, Michigan."

Only one of the six students has ever been to Washington DC before. They are all looking forward to exploring the Nation's Capital. Cassopolis junior Olivia Nelson says, "The main thing I'm looking forward to on this trip is seeing the White House with my own eyes. Being able to be that close to the White House is a great experience." Kohn says visiting the home of our first African American President will also be a highlight for him. He hopes to learn more about Washington DC and politics.

Other students emphasize that the opportunity to be in a new place and meet new people will be the best part of the trip. Brigitte Gomez, a junior at Cover High School, says "I don't get to travel or meet new people, so I am very excited to go to DC." Norman, adds that he too has never had an opportunity like this before. Coloma freshman Esmeralda Santos says she is looking forward to getting out of her comfort zone, she thinks it will be a good experience to be away from her home and the things she is used to.

JAG is a national school-to-career transition and dropout prevention initiative, which is offered during regular school hours at Benton Harbor, Coloma, Covert, Cassopolis, and Niles high schools. It is also offered at the Michigan Works! Bridge Academy and in Benton Harbor's Fair Plain Middle School. It is a component of YouthWorks!, a comprehensive, tri-county effort to prepare young people for the workplace.

The JAG program incorporates participation in community service and learning projects to develop leadership, communication and career-readiness skills that will help students graduate and successfully pursue post-secondary education or job placement.

Michigan Works, which administers the JAG classes, is a non-profit workforce development organization providing the skilled workforce necessary to meet the needs of employers. The organization offers no cost services to employers, jobseekers, and youth.

For more information about JAG or other Michigan Works services, call 1-800-533-5800 or visit www.miworks.org.###