

HCS HBs 1861 & 1864 -- PUBLIC ASSISTANCE BENEFITS

SPONSOR: Brown

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass" by the Committee on Government Oversight and Accountability by a vote of 6 to 3.

This bill changes the law regarding public benefit assistance. In its main provisions, the bill:

(1) Requires the Department of Social Services to establish a pilot program in at least one rural and one urban area to provide Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participants with access and the ability to afford fresh fruit and vegetables when purchasing fresh produce at farmers' markets. Participants must be able to:

(a) Purchase fresh produce with SNAP benefits with an electronic benefit transfer (EBT) card;

(b) Receive a dollar-for-dollar match for every SNAP dollar spent at a participating farmers' market in an amount up to \$10 per week; and

(c) Purchases of approved fresh produce by SNAP participants will automatically trigger matching funds reimbursement into the participant accounts by the department;

(2) Narrows the prohibition on the use of EBT cards in specified establishments to cover the purchase of alcoholic beverages, lottery tickets, or tobacco products in those establishments and repeals the prohibition on using the EBT card in places and for items that are marketed to adults and not in the best interest of a child;

(3) Prohibits the owner or proprietor of a specified business from adopting any policy that encourages, permits, or acquiesces in its employees knowingly accepting EBT cards for prohibited purchases;

(4) Requires any recipient of benefits who does not make at least one transaction in the state during a period of 90 days to have his or her EBT card temporarily suspended, pending an investigation by the department to determine if he or she is a Missouri resident. To ensure that benefits are not erroneously closed, a recipient must notify the department of the reasons why he or she cannot be within the state for 90 days. A recipient who does not make an EBT transaction within 60 days must be given a notice of the possibility of suspension of funds if a transaction is not made within 30 days after the notice;

(5) Repeals the provision requiring an automatic administrative hearing after an applicant or recipient of temporary assistance for needy families benefits tests positive for a controlled substance or refuses to test. The applicant may request an administrative hearing; and

(6) Requires the department to implement an automated process to ensure an applicant is eligible to apply for a benefit program. The automated process must be designed to periodically review any current beneficiary to ensure he or she is still eligible for any benefit they are receiving. The system must check applicant and recipient information against multiple sources of information through an automated process.

The provisions relating to farmers' markets will expire six years after their effective date.

PROPONENTS: Supporters of HB 1861 say that a surprising number of public benefit recipients use their benefits outside the state of Missouri for extended time periods.

Supporters of HB 1864 say that a system that could automatically check on other public assistance benefits when one is canceled could save the state a lot of money.

Testifying for HB 1861 and HB 1864 bill was Representative Brown.

HB 1861 and HB 1864 OPPONENTS: There was no opposition voiced to the committee.

OTHERS: Others testifying on HB 1861 say it is possible to stop placing new benefits on a card, but it is not possible to wipe off benefits that are already on a card. Sometimes, as in cases of domestic violence, a benefit recipient may have to cross state lines to get protected housing arrangements, so a proactive notice would be a good idea.

Testifying on the bill were Harry Otto, Office of the State Auditor; and Missouri Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence.