

HCS HBs 1861 & 1864 -- PUBLIC ASSISTANCE BENEFITS (Brown)

This bill changes the laws regarding public assistance benefits. In its main provisions, the bill:

(1) Requires the Department of Social Services to establish, subject to federal approval, 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 purchase fresh produce with SNAP benefits with an electronic benefit transfer (EBT) card and receive a dollar-for-dollar match for every SNAP dollar spent at a participating farmers' market in an amount up to \$10 per week. Purchases of approved fresh produce by SNAP participants must automatically trigger matching funds reimbursement into the participant accounts by the department;

(2) Requires the department to seek a waiver from the federal government to mandate the use of photo identification for continued eligibility in the food stamp program. Within a year of receiving the waiver, each EBT card must have a photograph of the recipient or protective payee imprinted on the card. The card will be good for three years. The card must not be accepted if the photograph does not match the person presenting the card;

(3) Changes the prohibition on the use of EBT cards in specified establishments to the prohibition on 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 primarily marketed for or used by adults and/or is not in the best interests of the child or household;

(4) 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;

(5) 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 benefit payments to the EBT account temporarily suspended, pending an investigation by the department to determine if he or she is no longer a Missouri resident. If the department finds that the recipient is no longer a Missouri resident, it must close the recipient's benefits. 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 more than 90 days. A recipient who does not make an EBT transaction within the state for 60 days must be given notice of the possibility of suspension of

funds if a transaction is not made within 30 days after the notice;

(6) 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 submit to a test. The applicant may request an administrative hearing; and

(7) 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 he or she is receiving. The system must check applicant and recipient information against multiple sources of information through an automated process.

The provisions of the bill regarding the pilot program allowing public assistance recipients to purchase fresh produce at farmers' markets will expire six years after the effective date of the provisions.