

HB 1213 -- PUBLIC ASSISTANCE BENEFITS

SPONSOR: Guernsey

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

- (1) Requires the Family Support Division within the Department of Social Services, when determining eligibility and the amount of public assistance benefits to be granted pursuant to federal aided programs, to take into account the income and resources of all relatives, members of the household, and any other individuals who are 21 years of age or older and living in the home;
- (2) Requires retail establishments accepting electronic benefit cards for payment to verify that the photograph on the card matches the identity of the person presenting the card;
- (3) Specifies that notwithstanding the department's screening program, case workers must be given the ultimate discretion to determine whether there is reasonable cause to believe an applicant or recipient engages in the illegal use of controlled substances. The department is prohibited from creating any rule or policy that would prohibit a caseworker from requiring a test for any applicant or recipient the case worker has reasonable cause to believe engages in the illegal use of controlled substances. Any department employee that interferes with the drug testing of the applicant or recipient when the case worker has reasonable cause will be subject to immediate termination of employment;
- (4) Requires that any applicant or recipient of temporary assistance for needy families (TANF) benefits who is found to have made a cash withdrawal at any casino, gambling casino, or gaming establishment after an administrative hearing conducted by the department to be declared ineligible for TANF benefits for a period of three years from the date of the administrative hearing decision. Other members of the household who remain eligible for TANF must continue to receive benefits as protective or vendor payments to a third-party payee;
- (5) Specifies that every TANF recipient 16 years of age or older, with the exception of recipients under the age of 19 who are enrolled full-time in high school, must participate in work activities in accordance with federal regulations;
- (6) Requires all recipients of TANF benefits to provide proof that all dependent children who are eligible for enrollment in a public school are enrolled and attending school regularly;

(7) Requires the MO HealthNet Division within the department to screen all recipients of MO HealthNet benefits to determine if they are eligible to participate in the Health Insurance Premium Payment (HIPPP) Program. All eligible recipients must participate in the program if it is determined to be cost effective for the division;

(8) Requires the department to imprint a photograph of the recipient on all electronic benefit cards distributed for food stamps. The card will expire and be subject to renewal after three years;

(9) Requires the department to establish rules and regulations that ensure compliance with federal law and take into account individuals and households with special needs as well as ensuring that all appropriate household members or authorized representatives are able to access benefits as necessary;

(10) Specifies that any person who knowingly and intentionally commits fraud in obtaining or attempting to obtain public assistance benefits must lose eligibility for the benefits permanently;

(11) Specifies the requirements a public assistance benefits fraud investigation must meet to be sufficient;

(12) Authorizes the department to terminate the employment of any fraud investigator who fails to comply with the requirements of a public assistance benefits fraud investigation;

(13) Requires the department to establish and implement a welfare-to-work program that requires all recipients of TANF benefits to make at least 20 job contacts per week. Recipients must be allowed to work as unpaid interns for a governmental entity, and those working as interns are only required to make 10 job contacts per week. Any county, city or other political subdivision must be allowed to submit to the department available intern positions in which TANF recipients may be placed; and

(14) Requires all recipients of TANF, food stamps, child care assistance, supplemental nutrition assistance, or any other similar governmental assistance program who are at least 18 years of age to possess a high school diploma or a graduate equivalency diploma. Any applicant who does not possess a high school diploma or graduate equivalency degree has two years from the date of the application for assistance to obtain a high school diploma and if all other eligibility criteria are met, must receive benefits during the two-year time period.