

HCS SCS SB 680 -- PUBLIC ASSISTANCE BENEFITS

SPONSOR: Curls (Wieland)

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass" by the Committee on Government Oversight and Accountability by a vote of 7 to 0.

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 food at farmers' markets and in vending urban agricultural zones. Participants must be able to purchase fresh food with SNAP benefits with an electronic benefit transfer (EBT) card and receive a dollar-for-dollar match for every SNAP dollar spent in an amount up to \$10 per week. Matching funds reimbursement into the vendor accounts by the department is automatically triggered (Section 208.018, RSMo);

(2) 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 items determined by rule to be primarily marketed for or used by adults or not in the best interests of the child or household (Section 208.024.1);

(3) Prohibits the owner or proprietor of a specified business from adopting any policy that encourages, permits, or acquiesces its employees to knowingly accept EBT cards for a prohibited purchase (Section 208.024.2);

(4) Requires any recipient of benefits who does not make at least one transaction in the state during a 90 day period 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. A recipient whose case is closed may appeal to the director. A recipient who does not make an EBT transaction in 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 (Sections 208.024.3 and 208.024.4);

(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 submit to a test. The applicant may request an administrative hearing with the director (Section 208.027);

(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 he or she is receiving. The system must check applicant and recipient information against multiple sources of information through an automated process (Section 208.238); and

(7) Allows an exemption under the federal Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996, to an individual who has a felony conviction under federal or state law involving possession or use of a controlled substance to be eligible for food stamp benefits if the individual, as determined by the Department of Social Services, successfully participates in, is accepted for treatment, is on a waiting list for, or has satisfactorily completed a substance abuse treatment program approved by the Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse; has been determined by a division-certified treatment provider not to need substance abuse treatment; complies with all obligations imposed by the court, Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse and the Division of Probation and Parole; and the person does not receive a subsequent felony controlled substance conviction. The exemption must not apply to an individual who has had two subsequent controlled substance felony offenses after the first felony controlled substance conviction (Section 208.247).

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.

PROPONENTS: Supporters say that if a person murdered someone, he could still get food stamps when he got out of prison, but a person with a drug felony cannot get this assistance. People who have drug convictions are being punished long after finishing their sentences and trying to live a normal life.

Testifying for the bill were Senator Curls; Deborah A. Neal, Kansas City Metropolitan Crime Commission and Metropolitan Organization for Racial and Economic Equality; Gary Wells, Operation Food Search; Wayne Lee; Christine McDonald, Metropolitan Congregations United; Missouri Catholic Conference; and Greater Kansas City Local Initiatives Support Corporation.

OPPONENTS: There was no opposition voiced to the committee.