

HCS HB 343 -- PUBLIC ASSISTANCE BENEFITS

SPONSOR: Guernsey

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass" by the Committee on Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities by a vote of 7 to 3.

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

- (1) Requires the Division of Family Services 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) Requires all recipients of temporary assistance for needy families (TANF) benefits to provide proof that all dependent children who are eligible for enrollment in a public school are enrolled and attending school regularly;
- (4) Requires the department to imprint on all electronic benefit cards distributed to food stamp recipients a photograph of the recipient. The cards must expire and be subject to renewal after three years;
- (5) 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;
- (6) Specifies that any person who knowingly and intentionally commits fraud in obtaining public assistance benefits must lose eligibility for the benefits permanently;
- (7) Specifies the requirements a public assistance benefits fraud investigation must meet to be sufficient;
- (8) 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;
- (9) 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 available intern positions to the department for the placement of TANF recipients; and

(10) 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 but less than 26 years of age to possess a high school diploma; any recipient 26 years of age or older must possess at a minimum a graduate equivalency diploma.

PROPOSERS: Supporters say that this bill is about welfare reform. Welfare abuse is one of the top concerns voiced by constituents. This bill is designed not only to root out welfare fraud, but to assist those on public assistance to help them obtain viable job prospects.

Testifying for the bill were Representative Guernsey; and Jim Lembke, United for Missouri.

OPPOSERS: Opponents of the bill say that the amount of job contacts required by the bill is too high and a recipient could fraudulently report job contacts with ease.

Testifying against the bill were Wayne Lee; Missouri Retailers Association; and Missouri Grocers' Association.