

HB 985 -- ELIGIBILITY DATA VERIFICATION FOR PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

SPONSOR: Haefner

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass" by the Standing Committee on Children and Families by a vote of 9 to 3. Voted "Do Pass" by the Select Committee on Social Services by a vote of 6 to 3.

By January 1, 2016, this bill requires the Department of Social Services to procure a contractor for the purpose of providing verification of initial and ongoing eligibility data for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program; Temporary Assistance for Needy Families; Women, Infants, and Children Supplemental Nutrition Program; Child Care Assistance Program; and MO HealthNet Program. The contractor must conduct data matches using specified information relevant to eligibility against public records and other data sources to verify eligibility data. The contractor must evaluate the income, resources, and assets of each applicant and recipient no less than quarterly. In addition to quarterly eligibility data verification, the contractor must identify on a monthly basis any program participants who have died, moved out of state, or have been incarcerated longer than 90 days.

Upon completing an eligibility data verification of an applicant or recipient, the contractor is required to notify the department of the results, except that the contractor is prohibited from verifying the eligibility data of persons residing in long-term care facilities whose income and resources were at or below the applicable financial eligibility standards at the time of their last review. The department must make an eligibility determination within 20 business days of receipt of the notification. The bill requires the department to retain final authority over eligibility determinations and the contractor must keep a record of all eligibility data verifications communicated to the department.

The department and contractor must file a joint report on a yearly basis, within 30 days of the end of each calendar year, to the Governor, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the President Pro Tem of the Senate. The bill specifies the information that must be included in the report.

PROPONENTS: Supporters say that the bill is a response to the current lack of efficiency in the eligibility verification process that ensures eligibility for the public assistance programs in Missouri. The current process is very complex and time consuming. The department still receives a majority of the Medicaid applications in paper form. Sources to verify eligibility have been found all over the place and currently state resources are siloed, so it is not possible for the department to easily access

information in the possession of the state. The cost and time needed for the department to build from scratch a system to electronically verify eligibility is entirely too costly; however, private contractors have the resources already and can do so quickly and efficiently.

Testifying for the bill were Representative Haefner and Maximus.

OPPONENTS: Those who oppose the bill say that in Missouri there is already a strenuous eligibility verification process. The proposed legislation is going to be very expensive and duplicative. The department will now have to review a large number of false negatives that will then require more extensive investigation that will result in individuals being still eligible. It is a waste of time and effort to keep checking the income for recipients of the child care assistance program because income is not relevant until the end of each year.

Testifying against the bill was Empower Missouri.