

SUBJECT: Limiting denial of supplemental nutrition assistance program benefits

COMMITTEE: Human Services — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 6 ayes — Raymond, Rose, Keough, Naishtat, Peña, Price

1 nay — S. King

2 absent — Klick, Spitzer

WITNESSES: For —Lauren Johnson, Rachel Cooper, Center for Public Policy Priorities; Kathryn Freeman, Christian Life Commission; JC Dwyer, Feeding Texas; Douglas Smith, Texas Criminal Justice Coalition; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Cynthia Humphrey, Association of Substance Abuse Programs; Kathy Green, Capital Area Food Bank of Texas, Feeding Texas; Jason Sabo, Children at Risk; Robin Peyson, Communities for Recovery; Celia Cole, Feeding Texas; Cate Graziani, Mental Health America of Texas; Laura Austin and Greg Hansch, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Texas; Lauren Dimitry, Texans Care for Children; Bee Moorhead, Texas Impact; Lisa Millner)

Against — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Colleen Vera)

On — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Stephanie Stephens, Health and Human Services Commission)

BACKGROUND: 21 U.S.C. sec. 862 governs eligibility for assistance programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) for individuals convicted of a felony and provides for certain flexibility at the state level in how eligibility is determined.

Programs such as SNAP are considered important to an overall strategy that promotes stable employment for those with past felony convictions. Some suggest allowing those with drug-related convictions to receive SNAP benefits can help them achieve economic stability, especially during transitions such as employment and training programs.

DIGEST: HB 1267 would limit the applicability of certain federal laws in determining the eligibility of a person convicted of a felony for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The bill would specify that a person convicted of a felony that had as an element the possession, use, or distribution of a controlled substance would be denied SNAP benefits only for a two-year period beginning on the date the person was convicted.

The bill would allow a state agency to delay implementation of any provision of the bill pending the request and approval of a necessary waiver or authorization from a federal agency.

The bill would take effect on September 1, 2015, and would apply only to an eligibility determination of a person for SNAP benefits made on or after that date.