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TESTIMONY 2013

H.B. 587

Dear Members of the Committee,

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to present testimony in favor of H.B. 587, which will cut waste in government agencies, ensure that Texas children receive the food and nutrition they deserve, and allow individuals who have made mistakes in their lives to successfully reintegrate back into our communities.

CURRENT RESTRICTIONS AGAINST ELIGIBILITY FOR SNAP BENEFITS WASTE TAX DOLLARS AND HARM CHILDREN

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) – at one time called the Food Stamps Program – is a federal program, administered by each state, which provides money to qualifying recipients so they can buy food. Texas is one of a handful of states that denies these benefits to otherwise-qualified recipients, for one of two reasons: 1) the head of household does not comply with certain requirements, so Texas disqualifies the entire household, or 2) an individual has a drug conviction.

No state pays for the actual SNAP benefits; they are federally funded. The administrative costs related to SNAP benefits are divided equally between states and the federal government. **Under current state policy, Texas taxpayers are paying for unnecessary investigations** by the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) into the eligibility of recipients:

- A head of household who is not working must participate weekly in 30 hours of employment and training programs. If he or she does not do so, the entire household is denied benefits. According to HHSC, **the administrative costs involved in assigning, tracking, and clearing sanctions may be reduced** if households continued to receive benefits regardless of the head of household's status.
- An individual with a drug conviction is currently denied all SNAP benefits. This ban was imposed by the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act, a federal bill that allows states to comply with its directives or amend them. Texas currently complies with the ban, although most other states have either modified or eliminated it. The HHSC estimates that **eliminating the necessity of checking each SNAP applicant for a drug conviction would save enough time to reduce current staffing levels by seven full-time-equivalent positions** statewide. This would increase the agency's efficiency by allowing it to better use those employees' time in other areas.

There is another, more human cost to Texas' current SNAP policy: It **leaves many children without the food they need to perform well in school**. Children have no control as to whether their parents or guardians comply with state-imposed requirements, and allowing otherwise-eligible households to continue to receive SNAP benefits would ensure Texas children lead healthier lives.

Continued on reverse.

KEY FINDINGS

- Amending current restrictions relating to SNAP eligibility would reduce administrative costs currently absorbed by the Health and Human Services Commission, as well as increase the flow of federal funds to low-income Texans, resulting in “marginal increases to both state and local sales tax revenue.”¹
- Allowing otherwise-qualified households to receive benefits, regardless of the compliance of the head of household with certain requirements, would reduce food insecurity, which is “associated with detrimental physical, psychological, behavioral, social, and educational functioning in children and adults.”²

COST-SAVING AND PUBLIC SAFETY-DRIVEN SOLUTION: SUPPORT H.B. 587 BY REPRESENTATIVE BURNAM

- H.B. 587 will amend eligibility requirements for Texans seeking SNAP benefits, resulting in **increased federal funding and an easing of bureaucratic duties** currently borne by the Health and Human Services Commission. This will allow the agency to move staffers to more crucial positions, resulting in a more efficient and streamlined agency.
- H.B. 587 will allow children who are currently denied critical benefits due to noncompliance by their head of household to continue to receive much-needed assistance. This will **enhance their food security**, improving their health and educational performance.

CONCLUSION

Thank you again for allowing me the opportunity to testify in favor of this bill. It will result in a streamlined Health and Human Services Commission that is better able to respond to Texans, while also ensuring that Texas children get the food and nutrition they deserve. The Texas Criminal Justice Coalition strongly urges you to support H.B. 587.

Citations

¹ Legislative Budget Board, *Texas State Government Effectiveness and Efficiency Report*, January 2013, 166, <http://www.lbb.state.tx.us/GEER/Government%20Effectiveness%20and%20Efficiency%20Report%202012.pdf>.

² Courtney C. Nalty, Joseph R. Sharkey & Wesley R. Dean, “Children’s reporting of food insecurity in predominately food insecure households in Texas border colonias,” *Nutrition Journal*, 2013, 12: 15, <http://www.nutritionj.com/content/12/1/15/abstract>.