

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6535

As of February 4, 2016

Title: An act relating to the distribution of supplemental nutrition assistance program benefits.

Brief Description: Expanding distribution dates for supplemental nutrition assistance program benefits.

Sponsors: Senators Warnick and Miloscia.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Human Services, Mental Health & Housing: 2/02/16.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES, MENTAL HEALTH & HOUSING

Staff: Alison Mendiola (786-7444)

Background: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). SNAP is a federal program enabling low-income families to purchase eligible food at authorized retail food stores primarily through the use of electronic benefit cards. The U.S. Department of Agriculture administers the program at the federal level and the state agencies administer the program at the state and local levels, including determination of eligibility and allotments, and distribution of benefits. In Washington, SNAP is called the Basic Food Program.

Currently, SNAP benefits are distributed from the first through the tenth of every month. States have the authority to stagger SNAP benefit issuance over the entire month as long as no participant goes longer than 40 days between issuance days.

Summary of Bill: Beginning on November 1, 2016, the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) must expand SNAP benefit issuance dates to the first through the twenty-fifth of every month. DSHS must assign new SNAP benefit recipients distribution dates within the expanded distribution period until recipient distribution is reasonably equal throughout the range of distribution dates.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 31, 2016.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: Other states have expanded distribution dates. If I were a recipient, I would want a lengthened distribution system as it would provide me access to more fresh fruit and vegetables. We have been advocating for these changes for over two years. There is a letter from the USDA that encourages all states to expand distribution dates - stores will have more products. There have been many meetings with DSHS, trying to get voluntary action similar to other states. The USDA offers to pay 50 percent of any costs incurred. Expanding the benefit dates to new recipients eliminates the need for expensive notifications. As a grocer, we have to have more staff at the beginning of month, and schedule less hours at the end of the month which is a disadvantage to the employees who have to balance their paychecks on a monthly basis. This also results in scheduling challenges, you want enough employees to provide good customer service. 75 percent of high-moving and promotional items are purchased at the beginning of the month. As a result of the current distribution dates, the food banks see a higher demand at the end of the month. Some concerns: There are 600,000 households receiving SNAP benefits. (1) Timeline of implementation even a model state took 8-9 months to fully implement the change, (2) DSHS is getting a new vendor, so February 1, 2017 would be a more preferable date, (3) 1st-20th would be a more appropriate distribution time, other states use this model otherwise there could be over payments.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Warnick, Prime Sponsor; Jan Gee, Washington Food Industry Association; Kyle Saar, Saar's Marketplace; Claire Lane, Anti-Hunger & Nutrition Coalition, NW Harvest; and David Stillman, Dept of Social and Health Services.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.