

NUTRITION ASSISTANCE FOR FAMILIES ACT

AB 828

ASSEMBLYMEMBER SANDRÉ R. SWANSON

BACKGROUND & ISSUE

Federal welfare law imposes a lifetime ban on anyone convicted of a drug-related felony from receiving federally funded Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. This law prohibits receipt of benefits – for the rest of their lives – even by those individuals who have completed their sentence, overcome an addiction, been gainfully employed but were subsequently laid off, or earned a certificate of rehabilitation or other form of clemency. Denying them food, clothing, and shelter makes it much more difficult for them to support themselves as they leave the criminal justice system and reenter society, and much more likely that they will return to criminal activity and drug use instead of attaining sobriety and gainful employment.

AB 828 requires California to opt out of the lifetime federal ban from SNAP benefits for persons convicted of a felony involving controlled substances.

Federal law gives states the option of passing legislation to modify the ban or eliminate it altogether.

Choosing to deny federally funded SNAP benefits is part of the reason that California only receives \$.74 for every dollar we send to the federal government. These benefits are supported entirely with federal funds and the federal government pays for half of the costs to administer SNAP benefits.

Mark Zandi from Moody's Economy's analysis of fiscal stimulus programs stated that for every \$1.00 spent on SNAP benefits, \$1.74 is injected back into the economy. This is the highest return on the dollar of all of the programs, including infrastructure spending, extending unemployment insurance and any of the tax cuts.

California's recidivism rate is 70%, mainly because ex-offenders have few resources when they return to their communities. This bill will begin to address the most basic of needs,

nutrition, as a means for former offenders to successfully reintegrate into their communities and help support their families.

The lifetime ban negatively affects children. When a mother is denied cash assistance or SNAP benefits, her children suffer. While the children of the formerly incarcerated can still qualify for benefits, a family's funds go toward caring for the entire family, not just the individuals who qualify for federal assistance.

Denying assistance to adults with drug convictions forces families to stretch their already meager budgets. Lifting the ban

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supports parents in caring for their families and rebuilding relationships with their children.

The lifetime ban may increase the cost of state-funded programs, as individuals with felony drug convictions rely on state-funded services for support.

EXISTING LAW

California State law currently provides that persons convicted of certain felonies related to controlled substances are ineligible for SNAP benefits if they have not completed or are enrolled in a drug treatment program, or can demonstrate that the drug use has ceased. Many individuals with drug related felonies are still completely ineligible for SNAP benefit.

If a person's most critical needs are not met when they re-enter society after being in prison, they won't be able to successfully return to their communities. In fact, without basic support, many of them will be inclined to return to criminal activity and drug use instead of attaining sobriety and gainful employment.

~Assemblymember Swanson