

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
82R21191 KLA-D

H.B. 2819
By: King, Susan; Naishtat (Nelson)
Health & Human Services
5/18/2011
Engrossed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

The Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) determines eligibility for Texas residents who apply for benefits under the supplemental nutrition assistance program (SNAP), commonly referred to as the food stamps program. Observers point to the dramatic increase in the number of applications submitted to SNAP and note that HHSC has experienced difficulties in meeting federal timeliness and accuracy requirements for the application process. Interested parties assert that the use of outdated and inefficient procedures greatly hinders SNAP's ability to effectively respond to the immediate needs of applicants. H.B. 2819 seeks to address this issue by making changes relating to the operation and efficiency of the eligibility determination process for SNAP benefits.

H.B. 2819 amends current law relating to the operation and efficiency of the eligibility determination process for supplemental nutrition assistance program benefits.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

This bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, institution, or agency.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Chapter 33, Human Resources Code, by designating Sections 33.0005 through 33.028 as Subchapter A and adding a subchapter heading to read as follows:

SUBCHAPTER A. NUTRITIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS IN GENERAL

SECTION 2. Amends Chapter 33, Human Resources Code, by adding Subchapter B, as follows:

SUBCHAPTER B. SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM: ELIGIBILITY DETERMINATION PROCESS EFFICIENCY

Sec. 33.051. DEFINITIONS. Defines, in this subchapter "commission" and "supplemental nutrition assistance program."

Sec. 33.052. APPLICATION ASSISTANCE. (a) Requires the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) to develop procedures to ensure that clear guidance on program eligibility requirements is provided to supplemental nutrition assistance applicants and prospective applicants and mechanisms are established, including Internet and e-mail mechanisms, as appropriate, by which applicants can obtain answers to basic program-related questions; and information is provided to each applicant in person, by e-mail, by telephone, or through the mail, as appropriate, about information the applicant is required to submit for purposes of the eligibility determination process.

(b) Requires HHSC to consider the feasibility and cost-effectiveness of using office personnel or an automated system or systems to support the eligibility determination process by contacting an applicant in advance of an applicant's scheduled interview to remind the applicant of the interview and the documentation that must be presented at the interview.

Sec. 33.053. USE OF TECHNOLOGY TO PROMOTE EFFICIENCY AND FRAUD DETECTION. (a) Requires HHSC to consider the feasibility and cost-effectiveness of using readily available document scanning technology to reduce storage and maintenance costs and potential loss of data by creating electronic case files for supplemental nutrition assistance cases instead of maintaining physical files for those cases. Requires HHSC to use that technology if determined feasible and cost-effective.

(b) Requires HHSC to implement, if feasible and cost-effective, a risk scoring program for supplemental nutrition assistance applications to streamline the eligibility determination process, reduce errors, and strengthen fraud detection. Requires that a risk scoring program implemented by HHSC be capable of ranking applications based on complexity so that more experienced eligibility determination staff members can be used to process more difficult cases and cases with fraud characteristics, and applications ranked as low-risk on fraud characteristics can be processed more expeditiously.

Sec. 33.054. WORKFORCE MANAGEMENT. Requires HHSC to improve its management of supplemental nutrition assistance eligibility determination staff by:

- (1) establishing clear performance expectations that can serve as the basis for performance assessments;
- (2) planning for anticipated staffing needs;
- (3) revising policies regarding overtime and accrual of compensatory time to ensure that eligibility determination staff members have access to supervisors as necessary;
- (4) assessing the effectiveness of training provided to new eligibility determination staff members; and
- (5) evaluating the compensation of eligibility determination staff members to determine if the compensation is sufficient to recruit qualified staff members and retain experienced staff members.

Sec. 33.055. PROGRAM MANAGEMENT INFORMATION. (a) Requires HHSC, in conjunction with state, regional, and local eligibility determination offices, to identify eligibility determination program performance indicators with respect to which data should periodically be collected. Requires HHSC to implement a process for collecting data on the identified performance indicators.

(b) Requires HHSC to provide periodic management reports generated by the automated eligibility system to eligibility determination offices. Requires that the reports include information regarding the number of pending supplemental nutrition assistance applications and the number of those applications that have not been processed within applicable timeliness standards.

(c) Requires HHSC to use data collected under Subsection (a) and the reports described by Subsection (b) to develop and assess strategies for:

- (1) streamlining the supplemental nutrition assistance eligibility determination process;
- (2) improving timeliness of eligibility determinations; and
- (3) accommodating increases in applications received.

SECTION 3. Requires HHSC, to the extent available for this purpose, to use supplemental federal funding provided for the administration of the supplemental nutrition assistance program to implement Subchapter B, Chapter 33, Human Resources Code, as added by this Act.

SECTION 4. Effective date: September 1, 2011.