



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Catharine Young

Senate Passes Public Assistance Integrity Act

CATHARINE YOUNG June 19, 2013

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Legislation Would Curb Abuse of Public Assistance

ALBANY - The New York State Senate has passed the "Public Assistance Integrity Act," co-sponsored by Senator Catharine Young (R,C,I- Olean), that would prohibit welfare recipients from using cash assistance for tobacco, alcoholic beverages, lottery tickets or gambling.

"Temporary public assistance is supposed to help people get back on their feet as they work to become self-sufficient. Unfortunately, far too many individuals are abusing the program that is intended for groceries and other necessities. It is time to cut down on the blatant misuse of these funds," said Senator Young.

EBT cards work like a debit card for welfare recipients. This card contains both food stamps and cash assistance. Food stamps have strict regulations on what can be purchased; cash assistance does not. Cash assistance is intended for items that can't be purchased using food stamps, such as rent, utilities, soap, toothpaste, school supplies and toiletries, according to Senator Young.

"However, recipients can also legally use cash assistance to buy cigarettes and beer, or even fund an afternoon at the racetrack or an evening at a local strip club. Currently, there are no laws or regulations against using taxpayer dollars for alcohol, tobacco, lottery tickets or gambling," Senator Young said.

If signed into law, the Public Assistance Integrity Act (S966) would limit where, and how, EBT cards can be used. Last year, the bill passed the Senate 56-3 but Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver failed to allow action on the bill.

The federal government has mandated that each state establish a system of fraud prevention by February 2014. If the state does not act, the federal government will penalize

New York by cutting federal funding for cash assistance by five percent, or \$125 million. New York spends over \$2.7 billion each year administering cash assistance.

Assemblyman Andy Goodell (R,C,I- Chautauqua) is a strong supporter of this legislation, and has done a great job pushing for welfare reform, said Senator Young.

“Now is the time for the Speaker to pass this important legislation. We can’t afford to wait and risk missing the deadline and forfeiting a substantial amount of federal funding. The Assembly Speaker has repeatedly let this bill languish to the detriment of taxpayers and honest families who rely on EBT funds,” added Senator Young.