



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph A. Griffo

Griffo Says Senate Passed Public Assistance Integrity Act

JOSEPH A. GRIFFO June 18, 2013

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“Public Assistance Integrity Act” Would Comply with Federal Guidelines, Safeguard Taxpayer Dollars while Ensuring Individuals Get Assistance They Need

(Albany) - New York State Senator Joseph A. Griffo said that the Senate will act today on the ‘[Public Assistance Integrity Act](#),’ legislation that he has co-sponsored to help cut down on the flagrant abuse of EBT (Electronic Benefit Transfer) cards by prohibiting welfare recipients from using cash assistance to purchase tobacco, alcoholic beverages, lottery tickets or to gamble.

“The children, seniors, and families who rely on temporary public assistance must have advocates to make sure that their benefits are being not abused, while the taxpayer who helps fund these programs also demands a vigilance that the temporary assistance is used for the necessities that these programs were designed to provide,” Griffo said.

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, like soap, toothpaste, school supplies and toiletries.

However, recipients can also legally use this cash assistance to buy cigarettes and beer, or even to 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.

If signed into law, the Public Assistance Integrity Act ([S966](#)) would limit where EBT cards can be used and what they can be used for. Last year, the bill passed the Senate 56-3 but the Assembly didn't act on the bill. The Assembly needs to pass the bill this session or federal aid will be at risk.

The federal government has mandated that each state establish a system of fraud prevention in place by February 2014. If the state does not act, the federal government will penalize New York by cutting federal funding for Cash Assistance by 5 percent (\$120 million). New York spends over \$2.7 billion each year administering Cash Assistance.

Paula Reid, Welfare Investigator for Washington County and an officer of the [New York State Welfare Fraud Investigators Association](#), said: "NYWFIA supports this bill because it increases the public's confidence in the integrity of the social services programs offered to recipients. This bill will help in maintaining that integrity and working with those who use their benefits for their intended purpose."