



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph A. Griffo

Senator Griffo's Weekly Column #7: Protecting Tax Dollars In Welfare Programs

JOSEPH A. GRIFFO February 13, 2014

| ISSUE: **FAMILIES, ALCOHOL, TOBACCO, PUBLIC ASSISTANCE, FOOD STAMPS**



I believe one of government's most important functions is to provide a helping hand to those who are working, but are still struggling to meet life expenses, such as food, rent, utility bills and household necessities.

Public assistance programs are funded through taxpayer dollars, so it's in our best interest to ensure that the money is used for its intended purpose.

I have zero tolerance for recipients who abuse the welfare program by withdrawing cash from their Electronic Benefits Transfer card to pay for tobacco, alcohol, gambling and adult entertainment.

That's why I recently voted in support of the Public Assistance Integrity Act, which will crack down on these abuses and discourage beneficiaries from trying to scam the system. The federal government asked us to get tough on welfare abuse, and the Senate has responded.

Unfortunately, our colleagues in the Assembly have not taken up the bill. So far, they've deferred to the state Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance to handle the abuse through administrative means.

Federal leaders have given New York until Feb. 22 to show how it plans to curtail benefit card fraud and abuse, but the OTDA has remained silent so far.

At stake is \$120 million in federal funds that our state gives to needy families.

We simply cannot lose that funding. If we did, we'd have to cut assistance to the poor, make cuts to services elsewhere or raise taxes.

Governor Cuomo has already said he supports a prohibition on EBT cards being used at bars, casinos and strip clubs.

We can send a clear message to those on public assistance that are playing by the rules that we're looking out for them.

We can send a clear message to those that abuse the system that we have no tolerance for that money being misused.

We can send a clear message to taxpayers that we are keeping a close eye on the money, and making sure it's used judiciously.

We can do all that – but we need the Assembly to act now.

In the meantime, help protect your taxpayer dollars by reporting anyone who is abusing their welfare benefits. You can submit a report at [this website](#).