



March 22, 2001

No. 120

## FOOD STAMP ACCESS BILLS WILL INCREASE IMPACT OF CHILDREN'S MEDICAID SIMPLIFICATION

Many readers are aware that bills to simplify eligibility for Children's Medicaid are under consideration by the 77<sup>th</sup> Texas legislature. Advocates for children's health and low-income families should also be aware of important bills that would broaden the impact of children's Medicaid simplification, by simplifying access to Food Stamp benefits for low-income working families. This Policy Page describes the Food Stamp bills, how they complement the Medicaid simplification bills, and what you can do to support Food Stamp simplification. A separate Policy Page on the status of children's Medicaid simplification bills will follow shortly.

### HB 475/SB 184: TELEPHONE INTERVIEW AND RECERTIFICATION FOR FOOD STAMPS

The Texas Department of Human Services (DHS) recently estimated that 56% of Texas Medicaid enrollees who are not aged or disabled are in families that also receive Food Stamp benefits. Unless rules are changed to allow telephone or mail-in recertification for Food Stamps, families using a mail-in application and recertification process for children's Medicaid would still have to attend face-to-face appointments (in many cases more than twice per year) at a DHS office to keep their Food Stamp benefits.

By eliminating the face-to-face application and recertification requirement for Food Stamps for low-income working parents and parents in job training in favor of a telephone interview, SB 184 by Zaffirini and HB 475 by Naishtat will make it easier for these families to maintain both Food Stamp and children's Medicaid benefits, without costly and time-consuming trips to the DHS office. These bills also allow phone-in interviews for seniors and persons with disabilities, provided they have no earned income, and for families facing other hardship situations.

At present, 64% of Food Stamp recipients (not receiving Temporary Assistance to Needy Families - TANF) who are working or in job training must recertify for Food Stamp benefits at least every three months. This is a time-consuming process that can take several hours and require

several trips to the eligibility office. DHS uses short certification periods to keep track of changes in clients' circumstances that might affect the amount of Food Stamps they are entitled to. This allows the agency to maintain a very low error rate in the program, which in turn has earned them over \$46 million in enhanced federal funding. Allowing phone-in recertification will make it easier for families to get Food Stamps, without jeopardizing the success DHS has had in the area of program integrity.

### FOOD STAMP AND MEDICAID ELIGIBILITY RULES

Food Stamp eligibility is capped at 130% of the federal poverty level (FPL), so most children who qualify for Texas Medicaid could also qualify for Food Stamps.<sup>1</sup> Although income eligibility for these programs is similar, the value of the two benefits for a working family is not necessarily equal. This is because the dollar value of the Food Stamp benefit decreases as family income increases, while Medicaid coverage remains unchanged. A family at or near the Food Stamp income upper limit may only receive a modest Food Stamp benefit, whereas the Medicaid coverage for the child would have the same value as for a child in a family with no income at all. Another major difference between current rules for the two

<sup>1</sup> Eligibility for Medicaid varies according to both the child's age and family's income. Children under age 6 are eligible with family income up to 133% of the FPL, while children ages 6-19 must be from families with income under 100% of the FPL.



SB 184/HB 475 direct Texas to take advantage of the federal option to provide Food Stamps to any family with children who is eligible for or receiving a TANF-related service, as thirty (30) states have already done. **Note:** These bills also include the phone-in interview option described above.

1008 (\$4 million in General Revenue; \$9.5 million in TANF block grant funds for the biennium.) Be sure to tell them that while these bills will cost the state \$13.4 million in state money and TANF funds, **they will also bring in over \$55 million in federal Food Stamp revenue.** (For membership on the budget committees, go to <http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/tlo/cmte.htm>.)

**HOW YOU CAN HELP**

All of these bills have had public hearings before the House Committee on Human Services and the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services. While most of them are “pending” in committee—waiting for final budget decisions to be made—HB 475 has been voted favorably from the House Committee on Human Services and sent to the House Committee on Calendars, which will schedule the bill for a vote by the full House. Readers interested in supporting these bills can take the following actions:

For more information and talking points on these bills, visit our web site at <http://www.cppp.org/> and check out the testimony on SB 184 and SB 1008, or contact Celia Hagert at 512-320-0222.

You are encouraged to copy and distribute this edition of  
**THE POLICY PAGE**

**HB 475** – Contact the members of the House Committee on Calendars and ask them to schedule HB 475 for a floor vote ASAP (see committee list below).

**All Bills** – Contact your representative or senator to let them know how important these bills are, and urge them to support them. To find out who your representative and senator are, call 1-877-824-7038, or go to the Texas Legislature Online’s Web site at <http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/>.

**\$Show me the money\$** - If your representative or senator is a member of the House Appropriations or Senate Finance Committees, call them and urge them to appropriate the funding necessary to support HB 2251/SB

House Committee on Calendars					
NAME	District	CITY	EMAIL	PHONE (512)	FAX (512)
Rep Barry Telford	1	DeKalb	<a href="mailto:barry.telford@house.state.tx.us">barry.telford@house.state.tx.us</a>	463-0692	463-5896
Rep Paul Hilbert	150	Houston	<a href="mailto:paul.hilbert@house.state.tx.us">paul.hilbert@house.state.tx.us</a>	463-0572	463-1908
Rep Kenneth Brimer	96	Arlington	<a href="mailto:kenneth.brimer@house.state.tx.us">kenneth.brimer@house.state.tx.us</a>	463-0632	463-1761
Rep Debra Danburg	137	Houston	<a href="mailto:debra.danburg@house.state.tx.us">debra.danburg@house.state.tx.us</a>	463-0504	463-0024
Rep Harold Dutton	142	Houston	<a href="mailto:harold.dutton@house.state.tx.us">harold.dutton@house.state.tx.us</a>	463-0510	463-8333
Rep Brian McCall	66	Plano	<a href="mailto:brian.mccall@house.state.tx.us">brian.mccall@house.state.tx.us</a>	463-0594	463-5896
Rep Paul Sadler	8	Henderson	<a href="mailto:paul.sadler@house.state.tx.us">paul.sadler@house.state.tx.us</a>	463-0626	463-5896
Rep Jim Solis	38	Harlingen	<a href="mailto:jim.solis@house.state.tx.us">jim.solis@house.state.tx.us</a>	463-0606	463-1077
Rep Senfronia Thompson	141	Houston	<a href="mailto:senfronia.thompson@house.state.tx.us">senfronia.thompson@house.state.tx.us</a>	463-0720	463-0306
Rep Sylvester Turner	139	Houston	<a href="mailto:sylvester.turner@house.state.tx.us">sylvester.turner@house.state.tx.us</a>	463-0554	463-8380
Rep Gary Walker	80	Plains	<a href="mailto:gary.walker@house.state.tx.us">gary.walker@house.state.tx.us</a>	463-0678	463-1966