



THE POLICY PAGE

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The Center for Public Policy Priorities

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Welfare Bills Are Moving

Some Bad, Some Good, Key Bill to Address Immigrant Impact is Among Them

A House Human Services Committee hearing has been called for **Monday, April 31st at 5:00 PM in Room E2.012 of the Capitol Extension**. Thirteen bills are scheduled to be heard and public testimony taken. The bills scheduled for hearing include some very problematic provisions and some that would be positive changes to public assistance. Among them is HB 3431, the companion bill to SB 1067, the only legislation offering direct assistance with the impact of benefits cuts to legal immigrants. What follows is a chart containing a brief description of each bill and the Center's position on the legislation.

Notes: Chairman Hilderbran typically likes to get take bills in batches like this in order to get all of the public testimony out of the way. He will often then leave the bills pending for an actual vote at a later date. It is important that members of the committee hear public opinions about these bills through phone calls, faxes or in public testimony on Monday. It is also useful to show up at the committee hearing to sign a witness card on the bills, listing your position, even if you do not plan to provide written or verbal testimony. Several of these bills may be replaced by committee substitutes which could contain significantly different language that cannot be analyzed until the day of the hearing. It is likely that the hearing could take several hours, with no guarantee of when a particular bill will be heard. Contact information for the Committee members follows the chart.

Legislation	CPPP Position
HB 202 by Solomons	Oppose
relating to screening for criminal history and drug use of applicants for public assistance benefits by health and human services agencies.	
This bill would <u>require</u> any health and human service agency that administers a "public assistance" program to obtain a criminal history record on each applicant. Any applicant who is the subject of an outstanding warrant shall be ineligible for assistance. Additionally the agency " <u>shall</u> establish periods of ineligibility resulting from adverse criminal history." Health and human service agencies may also adopt rules requiring drug testing of applicants. If adopted, the rules shall include denial of assistance if drug use is found through a drug test. The rules may also require random drug testing as a condition of continued eligibility.	
HB 942 by Hilderbran	Oppose
relating to AFDC and Medicaid benefits for additional children born to AFDC recipients.	
This bill would deny assistance to a child born to a mother already receiving assistance. This is the "family cap" provision which was hotly debated last session and ultimately removed from HB 1863 as part of the final compromise on the bill. The bill includes an increased earnings disregard in an attempt to make the revision seem less punitive. However, it is still a "family cap" which is based on the flawed assumption that a recipient would have additional children for the \$30 or so receive in additional monthly assistance. The end result clearly is that poor children are made poorer and families on welfare are no closer to becoming self-supporting.	
HB 1439 by Hilderbran	Oppose
relating to use of financial assistance granted to persons with dependent children.	
This bill is an attempt by Rep. Hilderbran to create a "cashless" welfare system. He believes that recipients should not be allowed to buy things like beer and cigarettes and that the cash assistance should only be used to provide necessary support for children. This proposal both stems from and feeds into the public misperception of "welfare cheats". While there are legitimate concerns about how assistance is used, this attempt to control the	

Legislation	CPPP Position
<p>state's only basic income assistance is fraught with both programmatic and real-life problems. A recipient currently cannot pay rent and utilities electronically and almost any attempt to create a list of allowable expenditures inevitably misses important cash needs for poor families. The bill also would incur enormous costs associated with changing EBT programming and monitoring expenditures.</p>	
<p>HB 1784 by Hilderbran</p>	<p>Oppose</p>
<p>relating to the amount of assistance granted under the financial assistance program for persons with dependent children.</p>	
<p>This bill proposes to offer additional assistance to recipients who are in a work or employment activity. While a worthy concept, the cap of no more than 10% of the base grant would limit the assistance to about \$16 a month for the average family. A bigger problem is that the increased amounts must come out of the same pot of money as all other assistance, therefore suggesting that to provide this increased amount TDHS would have to reduce assistance to families not in a work program. A better approach would be to provide some sort of one-time bonus for successful completion of specific work or employment goals or to increase earnings disregards which have been proven to help clients transition to self-sufficiency.</p>	
<p>HB 1909 by Maxey</p>	<p>Support</p>
<p>relating to the methods used to extend the period of supported employment for TANF families.</p>	
<p>This bill would extend the concept of fill-the-gap budgeting from the existing small pilot project to statewide implementation, subject to the availability of funds. Fill-the-gap budgeting, like earnings disregards is a method of calculating benefits to allow a recipient to retain a small amount of assistance as they begin to earn income from work. These concepts have been used effectively in other states; were included in many state level welfare reforms; and, have proven to be an effective support for clients transitioning to self-support.</p>	
<p>HB 2084 by Hilderbran</p>	<p>Support</p>
<p>relating to the establishment of a pilot project in which vouchers are used for payment of certain health care services.</p>	
<p>This bill would test the use of vouchers for personal assistance and respite services.</p>	
<p>HB 2125 by Maxey</p>	<p>Support</p>
<p>relating to individual development accounts for certain recipients of financial assistance.</p>	
<p>Individual development accounts (IDAs) are a tool for welfare recipients to accrue assets for specific purposes without those assets reducing the amount of assistance they receive. Many states have used IDAs in conjunction with work programs so that at the end of a six or twelve month program the individual has some savings which can be used for further training and education, for work-related expenses or for other expenses related to becoming self-sufficient. HB 1863 included IDAs in a small pilot project which has yet to be implemented. This bill would ensure that any new subsidized work program would include IDAs as a component.</p>	
<p>HB 2508 by Hilderbran</p>	<p>Oppose</p>
<p>relating to a study and a pilot project related to the use of finger-imaging in the electronic benefits transfer program.</p>	
<p>This bill would direct TDHS to study the possibility of using finger imaging (electronic finger printing) in place of personal identification numbers (PINS) in the electronic benefits transfer program (EBT – the Lone Star Card). The study is not directed to conduct a cost benefit analysis of such a project yet directs that a pilot project shall follow the study. The costs of such a proposal would be enormous producing little, if any, savings, not to mention raising issues of the further stigmatization of clients. At a minimum the study should include a cost/benefit analysis and a pilot should only progress if it makes fiscal and programmatic sense to do so.</p>	
<p>HB 2678 by Christian</p>	<p>Concerns</p>
<p>relating to requiring an applicant for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families to provide the Texas Department of Human Services with proof of responsibility for each child for whom the applicant will receive assistance.</p>	
<p>This bill requires an applicant to provide proof that they are the custodial parent or other adult caretaker of each child for whom they are seeking assistance. TDHS shall by rule define what constitutes sufficient proof. This proof may already be required and should not add unnecessary paperwork.</p>	

Legislation	CPPP Position
HB 2685 by Van de Putte	No Position
relating to certain prohibited activities in the food stamp program.	
This bill clarifies definitions of what constitutes fraudulent use of food stamp benefits.	
HB 3428 by Naishtat	Support
relating to financial assistance for victims of domestic violence	
The bill would seek to implement a provision of the federal welfare act which allows states to waive many of the requirements of the law (such as time limits and child support cooperation requirements) for victims of domestic violence. The bill has been worded to include language to carefully implement this provision and also protect victims' access to employment assistance and other support services.	
HB 3431 by Naishtat	Support
relating to assistance for certain legal immigrants	
This bill is a top priority for the Center, it is a companion to SB 1067 by Zaffirini. The Federal Welfare Act is revoking eligibility for Supplemental Security Income and Food Stamps for most legal immigrants. The state officially estimates that 38,450 elderly or disabled poor legal immigrants will lose SSI cash benefits worth \$130 million, and 141,000 legal immigrants will lose Food Stamps worth \$122 million in 1998 alone. This bill would fund grants to community groups helping elderly and disabled immigrants to become U.S. citizens, and would fund temporary emergency grants to destitute elderly and disabled immigrants cut off of SSI. It is the only bill proposing assistance to Texas' communities with thousands of residents who will face hunger and homelessness as a result of the federal cuts. Funding for these efforts is included in Article XI of the Senate Appropriations Bill.	
HB 3528 by Naishtat	Concerns
relating to the education and work activities of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families recipients who are teen parents under the age of 21 or who have only school-aged children.	
The bill would make two changes to the Personal Responsibility Agreement (PRA) included in HB 1863. First, it would require that a recipient who has only school-aged children must participate in an education or work activity even if they have not been offered a slot in the JOBS program, regardless of whether there are resources to help her or not. Second, it changes the definition of a teen parent required to attend school from under 19 years of age to under 21. This could conflict with individual school district requirements. Both of these changes could also threaten the HB 1863 waiver because they alter the PRA.	

Members of the House Human Services Committee			
REPRESENTATIVES	Office	Phone (all area code 512)	FAX (all area code 512)
Chairman: Harvey Hilderbran	4S.04	463 0536	463-5896
Vice Chair: Elliott Naishtat	E2.808	463 0668	463-8022
Norma Chavez	E2.304	463 0622	463-5896
Wayne Christian	E1.412	463 0556	463-5896
Diana Davila	E1.414	463 0732	463-8119
Mike Krusee	E2.502	463 0670	463-1469
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