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**TESTIMONY 2013**

**H.B. 1141**

Dear Members of the Committee,

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to present testimony in favor of H.B. 1141, which will eliminate inefficiency in state government and ensure that Texas children get the food and nutrition they deserve.

### **CURRENT RESTRICTIONS AGAINST ELIGIBILITY FOR SNAP BENEFITS WASTE TAX DOLLARS AND HARM CHILDREN**

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) – at one time called the Food Stamps Program – is a federal program, administered by each state, which provides money to qualifying recipients so they can buy food. Texas is one of a handful of states that denies these benefits to otherwise-qualified recipients if they have any type of drug conviction.

No state pays for the actual SNAP benefits; they are federally funded. The administrative costs related to SNAP benefits are divided equally between states and the federal government. **Under current state policy, Texas taxpayers are paying for unnecessary investigations** by the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) into the eligibility of recipients because of Texas' full, voluntary compliance with a federal law that denies all SNAP benefits to any individual with a drug conviction.

This ban was imposed by the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act, a federal bill that allows states to comply with its directives or amend them. Texas currently complies with the ban, although most other states have either modified or eliminated it. The HHSC estimates that **eliminating the necessity of checking each SNAP applicant for a drug conviction would save enough time to reduce current staffing levels by seven full-time-equivalent positions** statewide. This would increase the agency's efficiency by allowing it to better use those employees' time in other areas.

There is another, more human cost to Texas' current SNAP policy: It **leaves many children without the food they need to perform well in school**. Children have no control as to whether their parents or guardians have had drug convictions, and allowing otherwise-eligible households to continue to receive SNAP benefits would ensure Texas children lead healthier lives.

### **KEY FINDINGS**

- Amending current restrictions relating to SNAP eligibility would reduce administrative costs currently absorbed by the Health and Human Services Commission, as well as increase the flow of federal funds to low-income Texans, resulting in "marginal increases to both state and local sales tax revenue."<sup>1</sup>
- Allowing otherwise-qualified households to receive benefits would reduce food insecurity, which is "associated with detrimental physical, psychological, behavioral, social, and educational functioning in children and adults."<sup>2</sup>

*Continued on reverse.*

**COST-SAVING AND PUBLIC SAFETY-DRIVEN SOLUTION: SUPPORT H.B. 1141 BY REPRESENTATIVES NAISHTAT, ALLEN, AND WALLE**

- **H.B. 1141 will ease the bureaucratic duties imposed on the Health and Human Services Commission, allowing that agency to more efficiently use its staff.** The HHSC must currently check the criminal background of every applicant for services, wasting money and staff time. This bill will allow the agency to move staffers to more crucial positions, resulting in a more streamlined and efficient agency.
- **H.B. 1141 will allow children who are currently denied critical benefits due to the criminal history of their parents or guardians to receive much-needed assistance.** This bill will increase the food security of Texas children, increasing their health and educational performance.

**CONCLUSION**

Thank you again for allowing me the opportunity to testify in favor of this bill. It will streamline the Health and Human Services Commission, and it will ensure that Texas children get the food and nutrition they need to live healthier and perform better in the classroom. The Texas Criminal Justice Coalition strongly urges you to support it.

**Citations**

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<sup>1</sup> Legislative Budget Board, *Texas State Government Effectiveness and Efficiency Report*, January 2013, 166, <http://www.lbb.state.tx.us/GEER/Government%20Effectiveness%20and%20Efficiency%20Report%202012.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Courtney C. Nalty, Joseph R. Sharkey & Wesley R. Dean, "Children's reporting of food insecurity in predominately food insecure households in Texas border colonias," *Nutrition Journal*, 2013, 12: 15, <http://www.nutritionj.com/content/12/1/15/abstract>.