

SUBJECT: Establishing a list of potential D-SNAP application centers

COMMITTEE: Homeland Security and Public Safety — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 9 ayes — Nevárez, Paul, Burns, Calanni, Clardy, Goodwin, Israel, Lang, Tinderholt
0 nays

WITNESSES: For — Celia Cole, Feeding Texas; (*Registered, but did not testify:* Christine Yanas, Methodist Healthcare Ministries of South Texas, Inc.; Alissa Sughrue, National Alliance on Mental Illness-Texas; Gabriela Villareal, Texas Conference of Urban Counties; Deece Eckstein, Travis County Commissioners Court)

Against — (*Registered, but did not testify:* CJ Grisham)

On — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Chris Adams and Wayne Salter, Health and Human Services Commission)

BACKGROUND: Human Resources Code ch. 33 subch. A governs the operation and distribution of the federal supplemental nutrition assistance program (SNAP).

7 U.S.C. sec. 2014(h) establishes temporary emergency standards for SNAP eligibility for households who are victims of a disaster.

DIGEST: HB 2335 would require the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) to collaborate with county judges to evaluate, develop, and maintain a list of potential sites that met federal in-person application requirements for supplemental nutrition assistance program benefits for disaster victims (D-SNAP). The list would be updated annually.

The bill also would require HHSC to assess the feasibility of accepting D-SNAP benefits applications online and by telephone and of staffing a high-volume call center to process those applications. This provision

would be subject to the receipt of any necessary federal waivers.

As soon as practicable after the bill's effective date, HHSC would consult with federal officials about repealing the in-person application requirement for D-SNAP benefits and to develop and seek authorization from the U.S. secretary of agriculture to allow online and telephone application submissions for D-SNAP.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2019.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

HB 2335 would better prepare the state to provide needed food assistance to low-income Texans who experienced significant losses as a result of a natural disaster.

After Hurricane Harvey, the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) faced difficulties finding sites that met federal requirements for the supplemental nutrition assistance program for disaster victims (D-SNAP) in-person application process. As a result, applicants faced long lines at application centers, and stakeholders expressed frustration with the struggle to find sufficiently large locations for those centers in a short period of time.

HB 2335 would require HHSC to work with local authorities to develop an inventory of appropriate D-SNAP in-person application sites, which would allow for logistical issues to be resolved before a disaster occurred. The bill also would require the state to explore the possibility of obtaining a waiver from the federal government so that D-SNAP applications could be accepted online and over the phone, reducing logistical difficulties and administrative costs involved in establishing secure, accessible on-site application centers.

Because current federal law requires potential D-SNAP recipients to apply in person for authentication purposes, creating a pre-registration system for potential recipients in disaster zones would be ineffective and

redundant. Housing pre-registration data would require infrastructure HHSC does not have and would not significantly improve efficiency due to contradictory federal requirements.

D-SNAP is not designed to provide immediate relief to families upon evacuation, but rather to assist people moving back into their homes after a disaster to restock after significant losses. While prioritizing care for evacuees in the immediate aftermath of a disaster is important, it is not the role of D-SNAP.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

HB 2335 should include a pre-registration process for people living in disaster areas to ensure more efficient enrollment when a disaster occurred. The bill also should include a provision that would prioritize evacuees in shelters for D-SNAP enrollment. Evacuees are generally the most impacted by the disaster and need the most assistance to recover fully.