

SUBJECT: Simplifying SNAP requirements for certain recipients

COMMITTEE: Human Services — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 6 ayes — Frank, Hinojosa, Klick, Neave, Noble, Rose

2 nays — Hull, Shaheen

1 absent — Meza

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, April 8 — 30-0

WITNESSES: No public hearing

DIGEST: SB 224 would require the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) to develop and implement simplified certification and recertification requirements for supplemental nutrition assistance program (SNAP) benefits for an individual who:

- was 60 years of age or older or was a person with a disability, as determined by commission rule; and
- resided in a household in which every individual residing in the household was 60 years of age or older or was a person with a disability, as determined by commission rule.

The simplified requirements would have to:

- allow an individual described by the bill to waive recertification interview requirements;
- simplify and reduce the number of verification requirements for certifying and recertifying eligibility to receive benefits, which would have to include the use of a shortened application form; and
- allow the individual to remain eligible for benefits for 36 months after certification and after each recertification.

An individual described by the bill would be required to submit to the commission a change reporting form every 12 months during the 36-month eligibility period and report to the commission, in accordance with federal law, when the individual received an increase in income.

The commission would be required, in a manner that complied with federal law, to use data matching to help enroll in SNAP eligible individuals who were receiving Medicaid benefits. HHSC could seek or use private funding to contract with a public or private entity to carry out this requirement.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2021, and would apply only to an application or recertification of eligibility of a person for SNAP benefits submitted on or after January 1, 2022.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

SB 224 would help address the difficulties associated with obtaining SNAP benefits for older adults and individuals with disabilities by simplifying the SNAP certification and recertification requirements for households comprised only of seniors or individuals with disabilities.

Texas has one of the highest rates of senior food insecurity, and these rates have only increased due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Individuals experiencing food insecurity often are forced to choose between food and medicine or between food and utilities, which ultimately can result in additional health issues and health care costs. Many seniors and individuals with disabilities who are eligible for SNAP benefits are not enrolled in part due to barriers in the application process, including difficulties with applying online, confusing documentation requirements, limited mobility and access to technology, and lack of awareness or knowledge of the program. COVID-19 protocols and limitations have made this process even more difficult to navigate for these populations.

The bill would address these issues by allowing older adults and individuals with disabilities to obtain SNAP benefits through an effective, streamlined process, ensuring that the program was accurately administered to the vulnerable populations for whom SNAP benefits are

intended.

Since SNAP is a federal program administered by the state, the federal definition of "senior", which is 60 years of age and above, cannot be changed by the state in the administration of the program. Privacy concerns related to the bill's data matching provisions are unwarranted as the SNAP and Medicaid data that would be used already is housed by the Health and Human Services Commission, and data matching processes already are being conducted by the commission. The bill would simply allow for these same processes to be used to identify and reach out to certain Medicaid enrollees that do not use SNAP.

**CRITICS
SAY:**

SB 224's age threshold of 60 years of age or older should be increased, as the bill's simplified certification and recertification process for SNAP benefits is intended to help vulnerable seniors and individuals with disabilities. Many 60-year-old adults are more than capable of navigating the current application process.

Provisions requiring data matching and allowing the Health and Human Services Commission to contract with a public or private entity to assist with such data matching raises privacy concerns, as the bill does not explicitly provide for the protection of recipients' privacy.

NOTES:

The House companion bill, HB 701 by Walle, was considered by the House Human Services Committee in a public hearing on April 13, reported favorably on April 20, and placed on the General State Calendar for May 12.