

SB 1585 -2 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

Senate Committee On Human Services

Prepared By: Iva Sokolovska, LPRO Analyst

Sub-Referral To: Joint Committee On Ways and Means

Meeting Dates: 2/7, 2/12

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

The measure creates a work group to study how people on food assistance can use their benefits for hot meals, even at restaurants. Tasks the Department of Human Services to start this program across the whole state or just try it out in a small area first.

REVENUE: No revenue impact

FISCAL: May have fiscal impact, but no statement yet issued

Detailed Summary:

Directs the Department of Human Services to convene a work group to analyze how to maximize the food choices for recipients of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits using federal funds to include purchases of hot foods and hot foods that are ready for immediate consumption, including restaurant meals. Specifies work group membership. Directs ODHS to develop a program based on work group recommendations, seek federal approval, and pursue federal options to allow recipients to use Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits to purchase said foods. Specifies program plan mandatory components. Directs ODHS to solicit public feedback on said plan. Permits ODHS to implement program on a statewide basis or as a pilot. Requires ODHS to report to the Legislative Assembly by January 31, 2025, on the implementation of the program. Directs ODHS to notify Legislative Counsel immediately upon receipt of any federal approval or denial to create new benefits or any notification from the United States Secretary of Agriculture that no approval is necessary.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- Provisions of the measure

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

-2 The amendment creates a task force to create a program that permits SNAP recipients have more food choices, like being able to buy hot meals. The Department of Human Services (ODHS) will provide the staffing for the task force. ODHS will also create a plan based on the group's findings to let SNAP users buy hot food. The Task Force has to report to the Legislative Assembly on the progress of this program by January 31, 2025. ODHS has to let the Legislative Counsel know as soon as they get approval from the federal government for this program.

Detailed Summary:

Replaces the measure. Establishes the Task Force on Maximizing Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Benefits and specifies its membership. Directs task force to analyze federal funding options to maximize food choices for recipients of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits, including using benefits to purchase hot foods. Directs the Department of Human Services (ODHS) to provide staff support to the task force. Directs ODHS develop a plan to implement a program for SNAP recipients to use their benefits to purchase hot foods based on the task force analysis. Directs the task force to report on the implementation of the program to the Legislative Assembly by January 31, 2025. One year after receipt of approval necessary to implement said

program, requires ODHS to allow SNAP recipients who lack access to kitchen facilities or a means of preparing meals to use their benefits to purchase hot foods. Directs ODHS to inform the Legislative Counsel immediately after receiving federal approval, denial, or notice of no approval needed. Takes effect on the 91st day following adjournment sine die.

BACKGROUND:

The [Restaurant Meals Program \(RMP\)](#) is a choice states can make to let specific Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) clients buy ready-made meals at restaurants using their SNAP benefits. This option is for people who can't cook their own meals or don't have a permanent place to store and prepare food. It has been part of the country's food stamps program since 1977.

To be eligible for the RMP, SNAP clients must be certified for SNAP in a state that has an RMP and all members of the household must be either:

- Elderly (60 years of age or older);
- disabled (receives disability or blindness payments or receives disability retirement benefits from a governmental agency because of a disability considered permanent);
- homeless; or
- a spouse of a SNAP client who is eligible for the RMP.

To participate in the RMP, the restaurant must:

- Be in a state that has an RMP.
- Get approval from the state and provide a signed agreement to FNS.
- Be authorized by FNS to accept SNAP benefits.
- Participating restaurants must offer meals at discount prices.
- In some instances, the program allows beneficiaries to purchase hot, prepared food in the deli sections of participating grocery stores.
- Participating restaurants should have prominently displayed signage (usually on the front door or window) that says "Participating Restaurant: SNAP Restaurant Meals Program" along with the fork and knife logo.

The Restaurant Meals Program (RMP) is managed by individual states, and not every state provides this service. Presently, Arizona, Maryland, New York, California, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Illinois, Michigan, and Virginia have implemented the Restaurant Meals Program. Each state has the authority to decide the criteria for selecting restaurants and the number they want to include in their RMP. States interested in joining the SNAP Restaurant Meal Program must demonstrate to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) that certain groups within their population struggle to access nutritious meals through traditional SNAP benefits.