



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

Ritchie: No Welfare Benefits for Smokes, Booze or Lotto

PATTY RITCHIE June 15, 2012

| ISSUE: SOCIAL SERVICES, PUBLIC ASSISTANCE, FOOD STAMPS



Sponsors Bill After Constituent Complaints About Misuse of EBT Cards

Senator Patty Ritchie today announced legislation to stop the use of taxpayer-paid EBT welfare cards to buy lottery tickets, beer and cigarettes.

The bill, S.7671, introduced this week, came in response to complaints the Senator received from constituents who witnessed customers using their EBT cards—essentially a debit card that’s preloaded with welfare benefits, and can be used at groceries, supermarkets and a host of other locations—to purchase alcohol, tobacco and even scratch-off lottery tickets.

Senator Ritchie is a prime sponsor of the bill, which also prohibits the use of EBTs at casinos.

“Welfare benefits are designed to give a helping hand to people in need, to ensure that children and families get proper nutrition, help with expenses related to finding a job, and promote self-sufficiency,” said Senator Ritchie. “People who need help deserve these benefits, but taxpayers shouldn’t be footing the bill for beer, cigarettes and ‘win-for-life’ lottery tickets.”

EBT cards work like debit cards, and values vary based on the level of benefits that an individual or family receives, including Food Stamps and cash assistance. And while federal rules prohibit the use of Food

Stamp benefits for anything but nutritious grocery and food items, there is nothing to restrict the way that recipients use their cash benefits.

According to information on the website of the state Office for Temporary and Disability Assistance, which administers the EBT card program, “any item may be purchased using your cash benefit account where EBT cards are accepted.”

The cash assistance grants are supposed to be used for items like paper products, energy bills, and school supplies.

Senator Ritchie said she is working with other cosponsors of the measure to get the bill passed before the Legislature adjourns next week.