



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Mark Grisanti

## Welfare reform bill passes New York State Senate; Senator Grisanti was co-sponsor of legislation

MARK GRISANTI June 20, 2012

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The New York Senate today passed the “Public Assistance Integrity Act” which will protect public assistance for welfare recipients from being used to purchase cigarettes, alcoholic beverages, lottery tickets or for casino gambling. Present law allows cash assistance purchases of these items. The Bill S.7671 which was sponsored by State Senator Thomas W. Libous, Senate Deputy Majority Leader, and co-sponsored by Senator Grisanti (R-Buffalo) stops individuals receiving welfare from using the EBT card to make ATM withdrawals from

certain places including liquor stores, casinos and strip clubs.

Presently those on welfare receive both food stamps and cash assistance which is administered through the Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) debit card. The EBT card is designed to allow individuals to purchase essential items that cannot be obtained by using food stamps, such as paper products and school supplies, and to help defray the cost of housing and energy expenses. However, recipients can also and use this cash assistance to buy cigarettes and beer, or even to fund an afternoon at the race track or an evening at a local strip club.

“The Senate today made the right choice in protecting public assistance from abuse. Individuals deserve the opportunity to feed their families while tax payers need to have confidence that their hard earned dollars are being spent on essentials,” said Senator Mark Grisanti (R- North Buffalo). “Public funds should be spent on foods for the household like fruit, vegetables, meats, fish, cereals and breads. Using public assistance to support a transaction at a liquor store, casino or strip club is not only inappropriate but it goes against the intent of the welfare program. If we are to continue to provide a hand up to those less fortunate, it is essential we define the appropriate method of cashing in these subsidies.”

Federal Law passed earlier this year requires states to limit electronic benefit transactions in locations including liquor stores, casinos and strip clubs by welfare recipients before February 2014. If New York fails to comply, the State will forfeit \$120 million in federal Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) funds.

“Public assistance is designed to help needy families provide for their children until they can transition back to the workforce and become self-sufficient,” Senator Libous said. “This common-sense legislation would protect hardworking taxpayers from abuse while ensuring that individuals receiving welfare benefits continue to get the temporary assistance they need and deserve.”