



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Mark Grisanti

## New York State Senate Promoting Public Assistance Integrity Act

MARK GRISANTI June 21, 2013

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The New York State Senate will act today on the “Public Assistance Integrity Act,” sponsored by Senator Tom Libous (R-C-I, Binghamton) and Co-sponsored by Senator Mark Grisanti (R,I, Buffalo) that would help cut down on the flagrant abuse of EBT (Electronic Benefit Transfer) cards by prohibiting welfare recipients from using cash assistance to purchase tobacco, alcoholic beverages, lottery tickets or to gamble.

“The Senate again made the right choice in protecting your tax dollars by passing a measure that would stop the abuse in the welfare program. Using your tax dollars 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,” said Senator Mark Grisanti.

EBT cards work like a debit card for welfare recipients. This card contains both Food Stamps and Cash Assistance. Food Stamps have strict regulations on what can be purchased, Cash Assistance does not. Cash Assistance is intended for items that can't be purchased using food stamps, like soap, toothpaste, school supplies and toiletries.

“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 families receiving welfare benefits continue to get the temporary assistance they need and deserve.”

However, recipients can also legally use this cash assistance to buy cigarettes and beer, or even to fund an afternoon at the racetrack or an evening at a local strip club. Currently, there are no laws or regulations against using taxpayer dollars for alcohol, tobacco, lottery tickets or gambling.

If signed into law, the Public Assistance Integrity Act (S966) would limit where EBT cards can be used and what they can be used for. Last year, the bill passed the Senate 56-3 but the Assembly didn't act on the bill, putting federal aid at risk.

The federal government has mandated that each state establish a system of fraud prevention in place by February 2014. If the state does not act, the federal government will penalize New York by cutting federal funding for Cash Assistance by 5 percent (\$120 million). New York spends over \$2.7 billion each year administering Cash Assistance.