



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jack M. Martins

From the Desk of Senator Jack M. Martins

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Stupidity Should Have Its Limits

If you're a person who values common sense then prepare yourself to be disgusted and angry. I'm about to tell you about a sensible piece of legislation that's long overdue, but is being blocked by the New York State Assembly, which is shamelessly pandering to its constituents with your tax money. In fact, you may be shocked to learn that we even need this legislation at all, let alone that it's being systematically stymied by some in Albany.

Currently, New York issues something called Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards to our welfare recipients. It works much like a debit card and it allows us to help our needy neighbors in an efficient yet dignified way. The system conveniently provides a Food Stamp and a Cash Assistance component all on one card. As it stands, strict regulations dictate what can be purchased with the Food Stamp allotment. Cash assistance, on the other hand, is intended to pay for items not covered by Food Stamps, such as soap, toothpaste, school supplies and toiletries. To be clear, there are no restrictions whatsoever on the use of the Cash Assistance component. None. It's doled out like cash.

Now you can probably already guess what happens when you don't place any restrictions on a program. It gets abused and that's exactly what's happening here. The Public Assistance Integrity Act (S.966), a bill I have co-sponsored, was introduced in response to this abuse which would prohibit using EBT cards for tobacco products, alcoholic beverages, lottery tickets, and ATM cash withdrawals at liquor stores and casinos.

This seems like a no-brainer, right? Why would anyone want our already stretched tax dollars being spent on smokes, booze or gambling? Clearly, no one wants to cast stones because everyone has vices, but accepting that reality doesn't mean we should pay for those vices. That's why this common-sense law was overwhelmingly passed by my colleagues and I in the state Senate in June of this year. Audaciously – but not surprisingly – the state Assembly has sat on it and not taken any action.

Now I can give you their politically correct reason, which is that they feel it might be unfair. In fact, one senator actually argued that we might be penalizing mothers who withdraw money at casinos and liquor stores to simply buy milk! But if you'd rather hear the truth than have me sell you a bridge, here it is. The Assembly is controlled by and mostly made up of New York City representatives. A good portion of our EBT recipients live in their districts and they'd jeopardize their re-elections by showing some backbone here. That's it in a

nutshell.

Just to prove that this isn't a Republican versus Democrat issue, I'll add that the Obama administration is now also requiring states to restrict how the cash portion of social services is spent. If they don't, states risk losing 5% of their assistance funding next year. In New York that would come to about to \$125 million.

New Yorkers have always been extraordinarily generous when it comes to public assistance, but that shouldn't carry over to waste and abuse. For every dollar that's wasted, that means one less dollar to help those who truly need it. That's the true tragedy. Those who would oppose this change in favor of the status quo are only further hurting those in need and all for the sake of political pandering.

It's hard to fathom how something so rational is being ignored, but remember Albert Einstein observation that, "The difference between genius and stupidity is; genius has its limits." Enough said.

If you'd like to tell the state Assembly to get with the program, sign the online petition by [CLICKING HERE](#). Hopefully we can also show that stupidity has its limits.