



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

RITCHIE BILL WOULD BAR USE OF EBT CARDS FOR JUNK AND LUXURY FOOD

PATTY RITCHIE February 18, 2016

| ISSUE: **HEALTH AND WELLNESS**



State Senator Patty Ritchie has introduced legislation that would help low-income families and individuals stretch their grocery budgets and eat more healthy foods, as well as protect taxpayer dollars by limiting the use of EBT cards for the purchase of junk food and luxury items.

“The goal of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is to help low-income consumers make wise and healthy food choices—however in New York State, SNAP beneficiaries are able to use their taxpayer-funded EBT cards to purchase things like soda, candy, cake and other types of junk food and luxury items,” said Senator Patty Ritchie.

“Many of these items aren’t just unhealthy, they’re also expensive. This legislation would not only help low-income families and individuals stretch their food budgets further and promote health and nutrition, it would also protect taxpayers from abuse of a program that’s intended to help those who have fallen on hard times.”

Under current law, EBT cards can be used to purchase “non-essential” items—including unhealthy foods like candy, cakes and soda, as well as luxury items, like steak and lobster—that are subject to state and local sales tax. While the SNAP program restricts the use of EBT cards for certain things, like alcoholic beverages, cigarettes, pet food and hot or prepared foods, it still allows for the purchase of items that are not only not essential, but also contrary to the program’s purpose of promoting good nutrition.

Senator Ritchie’s measure (S.6761) seeks to move New York State closer to the SNAP program’s goal of improving public health, by limiting the use of EBT cards solely for use on items that are deemed to be essentials, including things like milk, juice, fruits, vegetables, granola bars, peanut butter and dozens of other healthy foods.

In addition, in an effort to protect taxpayer dollars, under the measure, the Office of Temporary Disability Assistance will be directed to establish a list of luxury food items that cannot be purchased with an EBT card.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the percentage of obese individuals in New York State is on the rise. Today, roughly 27 percent of New York’s adult

population struggles with obesity, up from 17.1 percent in 2000 and 9.3 percent in 1990. In addition, it's estimated that among adults, the medical costs associated with obesity and its related illnesses, such as heart disease, arthritis and obesity-related cancer, cost the country \$147 billion annually.

RELATED LEGISLATION

2015-S6761

- Introduced

- - In Committee Assembly
 - In Committee Senate

- - On Floor Calendar Assembly
 - On Floor Calendar Senate

- - Passed Assembly
 - Passed Senate

- Delivered to Governor
- Signed By Governor
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Relates to the use of public benefit cards and SNAP benefits to purchase luxury food items

February 17, 2016

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