

Senate Bill 33

Public Benefits Consumer & Food Safety EBT Purchases Senator Skinner (D – 09)

THIS BILL

SB 33 guides safe and ethical standards for online Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) purchasing by establishing a working group composed of major stakeholders including the Department of Social Services (DSS).

ISSUE

Families with children living in poverty depend on the EBT system to prevent malnutrition and the health complications that follow. EBT recipients have limited rights to recover stolen benefits or to resolve consumer disputes. Additionally, because these families are of low-income, they are at higher risk to food-borne illness and poor customer service. As a result, families need a system that ensures online retailers are food safe and practice fair and reliable food retail practices.

Because the EBT system is a “closed loop system,” that requires a pin, it cannot currently be used to make online purchases. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is currently pilot testing online purchases using the EBT system. The 2017 Farm Bill gives the USDA Secretary the authority to approve of online purchases using EBT food benefits once the pilot is complete.

In response to COVID-19, the state expedited the implementation of EBT online purchasing. California now allows for EBT online purchases which will support vulnerable populations, such as the elderly and medically vulnerable, in meeting

their nutrition needs, especially while a statewide stay at home order remains in place. California is actively working to increase access to the number of stores that accept EBT online in the future.

SOLUTION

SB 33 will provide necessary information on California’s EBT system to establish safe and ethical standards for benefit recipients through creating a working group of major stakeholders.

"Online purchasing is a potential lifeline for SNAP participants living in urban neighborhoods and rural communities where access to healthy food choices can be limited."

-Tom Vilsack, USDA Secretary

SUPPORT

- Western Center on Law and Poverty

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