



STATE OF MAINE
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
2 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, ME 04333-0002
(207) 287-1440
TTY: (207) 287-4469

Deb Sanderson
64 Whittier Drive
Chelsea, ME 04330
(207) 376-7515

RepDeb.Sanderson@legislature.maine.gov

March 18, 2015

*LD 1407 – An Act to Require Screening and Testing for Illegal Substances of Beneficiaries
under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program
Sponsored by: Deborah Sanderson*

Senator Brakey, Representative Gattine, distinguished members of the Health and Human Services committee; I come before you today to present a bill on behalf of the Governor, *LD 1407 – An Act to Require Screening and Testing for Illegal Substances of Beneficiaries under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program*.

Public benefits are a vital resource for low income families. While there has been much mentioned about the need for these benefits to be temporary, I believe the most important word in the program title, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, is families. This word indicates that there are children in the home and these benefits should be used to cloth, feed and house them.

Unfortunately, all too often these benefit cards have been found in conjunction with drug busts where they have been trafficked as cash. When this happens, these resources are not being used for the children in the home.

LD 1407 seeks to institute a questionnaire that all seeking financial assistance via TANF benefits must complete upon application. If the results of the screening indicate a reasonable likelihood that the applicant may have a substance abuse disorder, the department will require this individual to submit to a drug test. If that test comes back positive for illegal drugs, the applicant may still receive benefits however, they must participate in a substance abuse disorder treatment program. If the questionnaire doesn't indicate a reasonable likelihood of a substance abuse disorder, no further testing is required and the application process continues on the regular course.

*Proudly serving the residents of District 88
Chelsea, Jefferson, Whitefield, Nobleboro (part)*

Private employers often require drug testing as a condition of employment for a multitude of reasons ranging from safety to a zero drug tolerance policy. Applicants and employees know that they may be tested at any time and if they fail, could put their job at risk.

While the vast majority of individuals who utilize the TANF program do so responsibly, as I mentioned already, many recent drug busts have revealed several benefit cards that have been trafficked as cash to pay for drugs. This committee often hears testimony on the ravages of drug addiction and we know well that the rate of drug affected babies being born in Maine is growing. LD 1407 provides another potential tool to help us identify individuals at risk for drug addiction and help get them into an intervention program.

While some may view this legislation as trying to stigmatize the individuals who need public assistance I hope you pay close attention to the privacy aspects written into the bill. This information will not be released to a third party and the department is in fact, prohibited from releasing any results as indicated on page 2. Line 25.

Last year more Maine people lost their lives to drug overdose than car accidents; we had almost 1000 babies born addicted to drugs. Again, benefit cards are often being found in the possession of drug dealers during busts...dealers who are not benefit recipients.

I'll also reiterate that the most important word in the program name; Temporary Assistance for Needy Families is "families". There are children involved and every dollar being spent for illicit drugs is a dollar not going to care for the child or children in the home.

While not all who suffer from drug addiction are on the lower end of the socio-economic scale, the fact that we do have beneficiaries of TANF benefits trafficking their cards to pay for illicit drugs is very real. LD 1407 will add another tool for the department to use to help identify applicants who may be at risk and help get them into an intervention program, ensure that public assistance is being used in the manner for which it was intend and help to stabilize families in need.

I urge you to support LD 1407