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JEFF M. McCABE  
MAJORITY LEADER

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Testimony of Rep. Jeff McCabe

**LD 1144, An Act To Ensure the Integrity of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program**  
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Senator Brakey, Representative Gattine and distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee, I am Rep. Jeff McCabe of Skowhegan. I am here to present **LD 1144, An Act To Ensure the Integrity of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program**.

As stewards of taxpayer money, it is our job to ensure that it is used responsibly and in a cost-effective manner.

My bill attempts to do that by prohibiting the use of the electronic benefits transfer system at tobacco specialty stores.

It also requires the Department of Health and Human Services to develop an education program for recipients of benefits under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program that emphasizes that those benefits are to be used for supporting dependent children and cannot be used to pay for tobacco products, liquor products, gambling activities or lotteries.

It establishes penalties for benefit recipients who knowingly purchase these prohibited items.

In addition, the department must collect information on the use of TANF program benefits for tobacco and liquor products, gambling activities and lotteries. While attempts to purchase these banned items have been rare, we need to have that information to ensure that all provisions are in place to stop such abuse.

My bill then asks that the department report its findings, including recommendations and suggested legislation, to the Health and Human Services Committee no later than March 2017.

This bill is part of a bigger picture of ensuring that temporary public assistance is used responsibly and that we are promoting healthy lifestyles.

A bill I support similar in this area is Sen. Chris Johnson's bill that directs the Department of Health and Human Services to create a working group of various interested parties to make recommendations concerning best practices and criteria for evaluation of proposals for federal grants or funding to conduct pilot projects designed to provide incentives to participants of the federal supplemental nutrition assistance program to improve their diets, reduce obesity and support farmers and businesses in the state.

Junk food lacks nutrition critical to health. It generally is not a good source of vitamins, minerals and other natural substances that help protect us from chronic diseases linked to the obesity epidemic in our country. That is why I have co-sponsored a bill, LD 526, by Sen. Roger Katz to help address that issue.

I see this as one of a group of bills that promote the proper use of temporary benefits and promote healthy habits for Maine people.

We need to promote healthy habits and ensure that public assistance benefits are used for their intended purposes like food, rent and heat – not alcohol or cigarettes. Thank you.