



STATE OF DELAWARE  
**STATE COUNCIL FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**  
Margaret M. O'Neill Bldg., Suite 1, Room 311  
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The Honorable John Carney  
Governor

John McNeal  
SCPD Director

**MEMORANDUM**

DATE: March 20, 2017

TO: All Members of the Delaware State Senate  
and House of Representatives

FROM: Ms. Jamie Wolfe, Chairperson  
State Council for Persons with Disabilities

RE: H.B. 11 (Removal of Bar on TANF Eligibility Based on Drug Conviction)

The State Council for Persons with Disabilities (SCPD) has reviewed H.B. 11.

As the synopsis indicates, federal laws passed during the War on Drugs frequently barred access to public assistance programs for persons with drug felonies while allowing states to “opt out” of such bans. Most states have adopted limited or full “opt outs”. In 2011, Delaware removed the ban on drug felon eligibility for the Food Supplement Program (formerly “Food Stamps”) through enactment of S.B. No. 12. The SCPD endorsed that legislation. See attached January 25, 2011 SCPD memorandum. At that time the Council noted the common co-occurrence of substance abuse with mental health and other disorders. The Council also observed that limits on access to safety-net programs undermine successful reintegration of persons released from prison into the community. Last year, a Delaware News Journal editorial made the same point in supporting a prior version ( H.B. 365) of H.B. No. 11. See attached May 18, 2016 article, “TANF Bill Sensible Step in Prison Reform”. The article reported that 24 states had adopted at least limited “opt outs” of the federal bans on TANF and Food Supplement Program eligibility. The editorial also linked access to such safety-net programs to lower recidivism rates.

The TANF program has been long-recognized as an important resource for persons with disabilities. See National Council on Disability Position Paper, “TANF and Disability-Importance of Supports for Families with Disabilities in Welfare Reform” (March 14, 2003), published at <https://www.ncd.gov/publications/2003/Mar52003>. See also MDRC report, “Assessing and Serving TANF Recipients with Disabilities” (December, 2013), published at

<http://www.mdrc.org/publication/assessing-and-serving-tanf-recipients-disabilities> [noting that 40% of adult TANF clients may have a mental or physical disability]. The legislation would therefore have a disproportionate beneficial effect on persons with disabilities. The Councils may wish to consider sharing a positive analysis of this initiative with policymakers.

Thank you for your consideration and please contact SCPD if you have any questions regarding our observations on the proposed legislation.

cc: Mr. Brian Hartman, Esq.  
Governor's Advisory Council for Exceptional Citizens  
Developmental Disabilities Council

HB 11 removal of bar on tanf eligibility based on drug conviction 3-20-17



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MEMORANDUM

DATE: January 25, 2011

TO: All Members of the Delaware State Senate  
and House of Representatives

FROM: Ms. Daniese McMullin-Powell, Chairperson  
State Council for Persons with Disabilities

RE: S.B. 12 [Removal of Bar on Food Supplement Program Eligibility Based on Drug Conviction]

The State Council for Persons with Disabilities (SCPD) has reviewed S.B. 12 which removes the prohibition against persons convicted of any drug felony from receiving federal food benefit assistance. As background, the current statute (Title 31 Del.C. §605) bars Food Supplement Program (a/k/a Food Stamps) eligibility for persons convicted of drug felonies subject to some exceptions. S.B. 13 would result in the following simplified §605:

Pursuant to the option granted the State by 21 U.S.C. §862a(d)(1), an individual convicted under federal or state law of a felony involving possession, distribution or use of a controlled substance shall be exempt from the prohibition contained in 21 U.S.C. §862a(a) against eligibility for food stamp program benefits for such convictions.

SCPD endorses the proposed legislation which would have the same effect as legislation (S.B. 255) introduced in the last General Assembly. Council has the following observations.

Given the common co-occurrence of substance abuse with mental health and other disorders, the bill would ostensibly enhance flexibility in State "safety net" programs. On a practical level, if a person lacks access to basic sustenance for self and family, the prospect for recidivism may increase. The attached December 17, 2009 article notes that enforcement of the ban seriously undermines successful reintegration of persons released from prison into the community and has a disproportionate effect on women. The House Committee report on the predecessor bill noted the favorable effect on inmate transition efforts:

Committee Findings: The committee found that this law legalizes Delaware's "opt out"

option from the federal Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. The committee also found that this bill aligns with the state's prisoner re-entry effort.

Moreover, it is anomalous to bar food benefits from a person convicted of a drug offense when no such bar exists under federal law for persons convicted of other crimes (e.g. murder; rape).

Consistent with the attached May 10, 2010 DHSS memo commenting on the predecessor bill, at least nineteen (19) states have already lifted the lifetime drug felony conviction ban altogether.

Thank you for your consideration and please contact SCPD if you have any questions regarding our position or observations on the proposed legislation.

cc: The Honorable Jack A. Markell  
Mr. Brian Hartman, Esq.  
Governor's Advisory Council for Exceptional Citizens  
Developmental Disabilities Council

sb 12 food stamp bar 1-25-11

# OPINION

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## EDITORIAL

# TANF BILL SENSIBLE STEP IN PRISON REFORM

Don't let the headline fool you. A bill to "let drug felons get public assistance" isn't some kind of bleeding-heart effort to coddle criminals.

It's actually a sensible, if not small, step for Delaware to help its future.

The federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program is the primary government cash-assistance program for low-income families with children, designed to help adults get by as they try to get a stable job.

The monthly benefits depend upon the size of the family: a family with one child receives \$201, while a family of eight can get \$681.

A family can receive TANF benefits for no more than 36 months.

During that time, an adult in the family must either work or participate in "work-related activities," like searching for a job, for 30 hours a week.

Hardliners may decry "cons" living on the "government dime," but lest we forget that Delaware

struggles to transform inmates into productive citizens once they serve their sentences.

Our state's recidivism rate is about 50 percent after a year and 77 percent by three years.

A study by the Kaiser Family Foundation found Delaware was one of 11 states to spend more of their general funds on corrections than on higher education in 2013.

Long story short, we are pouring money down the prison hole as thousands of young lives — mostly those of black men — are flushed away, as are the hopes of their kids, who, too often, follow the same path.

Delaware is not the first state to learn this lesson and recognize the need to address it.

According to the Legal Action Center, 24 other states have modified — but not entirely eliminated — the federal ban on food stamps and TANF to those convicted of drug felonies.

Still, drug felons leave prison with, in some cases, hundreds of hurdles to overcome.

Consider this from the Alliance for a Just Society: On average, states have 123 mandatory bans and restrictions for would-be workers with felony convictions per state from employment in occupations or industries, from obtaining certain types of occupational licenses, and/or from obtaining certain types of business or property licenses. 10 states have more than 160 of these regulations, including 248 in Texas, 258 in Illinois, and 389 in Louisiana. Only nine states have fewer than 75 regulations.

Massachusetts has 70 such regulations. As of 2013, its three-year rate was 39 percent. In 2011, Louisiana, with its 389 regulations and the highest per-capita incarceration rate in the country, had a five-year recidivism rate of 48 percent.

Remember Delaware's numbers? 50 and 77 percent, respectively.

Every convicted drug felon must serve their sentence. It's what happens after that sentence that determines our future as a society.